

The Articulation of the Equality and Rights of Women in Bahá'í Discourse and Implementation

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Abstract

The origins of the Bahá'í concept of the equality of women and men lie in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. 'Abdu'l-Bahá developed it further, first in his correspondence with western Bahá'ís and later during his travels in Europe and North America as he spoke to audiences about the social teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. While he was in London in September 1911, he met with suffragettes, among others. On one occasion he asked one visitor why she thought women should have the vote. Her response included a metaphor of humanity being a bird with two wings, male and female, both of which are required if the bird is to fly. 'Abdu'l-Bahá incorporated this metaphor into his talks in the West and eventually into his writings and it has become an enduring description of gender equality found in many documents.

This essay explores how the concepts of the equality of women and men, the rights of women and the advancement of women have been articulated over time in the talks and writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the works of Shoghi Effendi, the writings of the Universal House of Justice and the statements of the Bahá'í International Community. It also considers how these concepts have been applied and developed by individual Bahá'ís and their families, within the Bahá'í community and in its institutions, and how this experience is being shared in public discourse.

Keywords

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When Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence,¹ social activist and suffragette, met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London in September 1911 her conversation with the recently-released prisoner of the Ottomans spoke at once to the feminist aspiration for equality for women, manifested particularly in the drive to give women the vote, and highlighted the focus on this issue in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. Unwittingly, she also succinctly articulated the Bahá'í position on the equality of women and men and provided Bahá'ís with a metaphor to explain their belief that they have used to this day:

A spirited conversation due to the visit of an ardent suffragist² will be long remembered by those who had the privilege of being present. The room was full of men and women, many Persians being seated in their familiar respectful attitude on the floor.

After contrasting the general position of the Eastern and the Western women, and then describing how in many respects the Eastern woman has the advantage

of her Western sister, 'Abdu'l-Bahá turned and said to the visitor: 'Give me your reasons for believing that woman today should have the vote?'

Answer: 'I believe that humanity is a divine humanity and that it must rise higher and higher; but it cannot soar with only one wing'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed his pleasure at this answer, and smiling, replied: 'But what will you do if one wing is stronger than the other?' Answer: 'Then we must strengthen the weaker wing, otherwise the flight will always be hampered'.

'Abdu'l-Bahá smiled and asked: 'What will you say if I prove to you that the woman is the stronger wing?' The answer came in the same bright vein: 'You will earn my eternal gratitude!' at which all the company made merry.³

Little could the recorder of this conversation have imagined that not only would this discussion be long-remembered by those who heard it but that a hundred years later it would form the very basis of Bahá'í discourse. So vivid is this description for Bahá'ís that although the metaphor has little scriptural basis,⁴ it has now passed into their general discourse and everyday parlance on the subject of the equality of women and men. Interestingly, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's primary diarist, Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarfání, does not appear to have recorded this metaphor at all in his descriptions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks in North America.⁵ The metaphor in this conversation has been echoed in Bahá'í discourse at every level. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself used it when he wrote to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace in The Hague on 17 December 1919:

And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.⁶

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st the favoured description of the equality of women and men has been the metaphor of the two wings of the bird of humanity. Since 1947 it has been incorporated into documents submitted to the United Nations by the Bahá'í International Community⁷ and has appeared in letters of senior Bahá'í institutions, information leaflets, articles and books.⁸

The Concept of Equality in Bahá'í Scripture and Its Application

The origins of the Bahá'í concept of the equality of women and men lie in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, for example:

Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God sheddeth its radiance upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women.⁹

This statement of women's equality with men does not imply that equality has ever been fully realized or even operationalized. Like many other truth statements found in Bahá'í texts – such as 'The earth is but one country,

and mankind its citizens'¹⁰ – it identifies what Bahá'ís accept as a reality but which is still aspirational in practice. Bahá'ís anticipate that the practice of equality will evolve over time,¹¹ will be unevenly applied in different communities and will suffer reverses before its full realization. In the meantime, Bahá'ís are to conscientiously apply this teaching to their own relationships and work towards its application in social spaces. How well they do this is a mark of their personal maturity and that of their communities.

Bahá'u'lláh outlined in his Book of Laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, some first steps that society and individuals can take to effect equality. These include the education of all the children in a family,¹² which 'Abdu'l-Bahá has elucidated by stating that the 'training and culture of daughters is more necessary than that of sons';¹³ and the requirement that everyone 'engage in some occupation – such as a craft, a trade or the like'.¹⁴ In addition, all the laws set out in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are applicable to both men and women; where Bahá'u'lláh 'has given a law as between a man and a woman, it applies *mutatis mutandis* between a woman and a man unless the context makes this impossible'.¹⁵ Thus, whereas it was impossible for all the implications of equality to be effected in the time of Bahá'u'lláh, social circumstances changed during the course of the 19th century and early 20th, making it possible for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to champion the rights of women and the extension of the franchise to them as he travelled in the West.¹⁶ It was this focus on women's participation in political processes, together with the education of women and girls, which appears to have attracted suffragists to his talks. His speeches were tailored to his audiences, which included not only feminists and suffragists but society women, club women, both wealthy and the poor, immigrants, African Americans and religious communities. Prior to his journeys in the West in 1911–13, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote letters to the Bahá'ís in Iran and the West, some of which were published in *Star of the West*, a Bahá'í periodical which began in the United States in 1910.

Among 'Abdu'l-Bahá's correspondents was Corinne True,¹⁷ who had become a Bahá'í in Chicago in late 1899. She was involved in the earliest efforts to establish an organizational structure for the Bahá'í community in Chicago in 1901, the 'House of Spirituality'. She was outspoken against the decision, taken locally, not to allow women to serve on it. After receiving a letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, possibly in the first half of 1902 or earlier,¹⁸ which encouraged women to 'found' 'Spiritual Assemblies',¹⁹ she formed the Women's Assembly of Teaching as a sort of parallel institution to the House of Spirituality, becoming its first president. Chosen by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to lead the effort to establish the first Bahá'í House of Worship in the West, True was faced with the additional task of overcoming the reluctance of men to take direction from women or even to sit on the same decision-making bodies with them. It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance to True that enabled the embryonic Bahá'í community to develop a greater appreciation of the principle of gender equality and its practical applications. For example, in one letter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained to her the basic principle of the equality of women and men found in Bahá'u'lláh's writings:

O maid-servant of God! Know thou that in the sight of God, the conduct of women is the same as that of men. All are the creatures of God and He has created them after His form and likeness; that is to say, after the form and like-

ness of the Manifestations of His names and His attributes. From the spiritual point of view, therefore, there is no difference between women and men.²⁰

'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to True on 29 July 1909, in response to her questions:

In the law of God, men and women are equal in all rights save in the Universal House of Justice; for the Chairman and the members of the House of Justice are men according to the Text of the Book. Aside from this, in all the rest of the Associations, like the Convention for the building of the Mashrek-el-Azkar, the Assembly of Teaching, the Spiritual Assembly, Philanthropic Associations, Scientific Association, men and women are co-partners in all the rights.²¹

'Abdu'l-Bahá also encouraged the education of women and girls and promoted the establishment of schools for girls in Iran, it being impossible at that time to establish coeducational schools. He specified that the curriculum for girls and boys be the same and linked this to the realization of the equality of women and men and to the establishment of peace.²² The curriculum was to include 'various branches of knowledge, in sciences and the arts and all the wonders of this pre-eminent time'²³ as well as morals and good conduct.²⁴ The practical application of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement was the establishment of schools in Iran by the Bahá'ís at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.²⁵ Principal among these were the Tarbiyat schools, the boys' school being established in 1898 and the girls' in 1910. American Bahá'í women, notably Dr Susan Moody and Dr Sarah Clock, were instrumental in establishing the girls' school.

The Women's Movement

'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived in London in September 1911 at the height of the suffragist movement and among the people he spoke with there were suffragettes, the most militant of the suffragist groups. The suffragist movement in Britain was bound up with other social movements, such as the rise of socialism and Fabianism and the birth of the Labour party (1900). Thus many of the people 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed were left of centre political activists. It was while he was staying at the home of Lady Blomfield at Cadogan Gardens that he daily met large numbers of people, including the above-mentioned Mrs (later Baroness) Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society, herself a women's rights activist and a champion of the rights of the working class. Among them was the Bahá'í Elizabeth Herrick, who joined the militant wing of the suffragists, broke a window in a government building and was subsequently imprisoned.²⁶ By this time the women's movement was a powerful social phenomenon and impossible to ignore. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself pointed to the significance of this:

In all questions which concern the welfare of a nation is not a woman's view as important as the man's if one would get a just and true consideration of all sides of that question? Therefore I am in favour of votes for women on every subject. This great woman's movement which is stirring and vibrating all round the whole world is a sign of spirit awakening.²⁷

Social Evolution of the Late 19th Century

Although it is possible to trace the emancipation of women to the Prophet Muḥammad, whose teachings were an advance on the mores of the time, it is in the 18th-century Enlightenment that the foundations for the modern women's movement are found. A cluster of related ideas born then changed the political and social landscape of Europe and North America, and eventually much of the world. What we would now call human rights concerns developed into the anti-slavery movement. For example, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the utilitarian philosopher, championed equality between the sexes, including women's right to vote and to participate in government. In 1792 British author Mary Wollstonecraft argued for the equality of the sexes in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (although her book was largely ignored for about 50 years). A sense of the extent of the social evolution in Europe and elsewhere can be gleaned from a look at some of the developments that took place in the period roughly between the birth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1844 and his arrival in Europe in September 1911. During this period what we would now call human rights concerns developed into the anti-slavery movement. In 1837 the first National Female Anti-Slavery Society convention was organized by Quaker activist Lucretia Mott in the United States. When in March 1840 the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London rejected the credentials of the female American delegates, Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton decided to take up the cause of women's rights.

In this same period in Iran, the Bábí poet Ṭáhirih (Qurratu'l-'Ayn) addressed large audiences in the home of the widow of the *Shaykhí* leader Siyyid Kázim in Karbalá' and held classes in the inner quarters for the women, speaking freely about her beliefs. Bahá'ís frequently link the beginning of the emancipation of women to her activities: 'Qurratu'l-'Ayn was really the liberator of all Persian women;'²⁸ and Shoghi Effendi wrote of her execution in 1852:

Thus ended the life of this great Bábí heroine, the first woman suffrage martyr, who, at her death, turning to the one in whose custody she had been placed, had boldly declared: 'You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women'.²⁹

The juxtaposition of the conference Bábís held in Badasht, Iran, from around 26 June through 17 July 1848, where Ṭáhirih confronted one of the prominent Bábí leaders, Quddús, and dramatically removed her veil, and the first women's rights convention, held just a few days later from 19 to 20 July in Seneca Falls, New York, seems to some to be more than coincidence.

Lucretia Mott's *Discourse on Woman*, written in 1852, the year of Ṭáhirih's death, which argues that the apparent inferiority of women can be attributed to their inferior educational opportunities, foreshadows by 60 years 'Abdu'l-Bahá's observation: 'It is not to be denied that in various directions woman at present is more backward than man, also that this temporary inferiority is due to the lack of educational opportunity'.³⁰ By 1866 the anti-slavery campaign in the United States had merged with the campaign for universal suffrage. In this year Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the American Equal Rights Association, an organization for white and black women and men dedicated to achieving universal suffrage. A number of

other significant developments took place in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth.

This overview gives some indication of the rapidity with which the women's movement changed, or coincided with, wide-ranging social developments which fostered the emancipation of women and their equality with men. It seems clear that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's articulation of the principle of the equality of women and men was attuned to the social movements gaining momentum in the West at the time, by the concerns of the people who asked him questions, and by the prevalent discourses of the day.

Women's Suffrage

On 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival in the US in April 1912, one of the first questions reporters asked him, even before he got off the ship, was his opinion on votes for women:

'What is your attitude toward woman suffrage?' asked one of the reporters. 'The modern suffragette is fighting for what must be, and many of these are willing martyrs to imprisonment for their cause. One might not approve of the ways of some of the more militant suffragettes, but in the end it will adjust itself. If women were given the same advantages as men, their capacity being the same, the result would be the same. In fact, women have a superior disposition to men; they are more receptive, more sensitive, and their intuition is more intense. The only reason [for] their present backwardness in some directions is because they have not had the same educational advantages as men'.³¹

This short response incorporates a number of themes that 'Abdu'l-Bahá developed further during his journey. For him, that women would get the vote was inevitable, part of the ever-advancing civilization of which Bahá'u'lláh had written.³² He disagreed with the sometimes violent measures that were used to draw attention to the issue but he had no doubt that it would be achieved. He was similarly confident that women would participate in all social and political enterprises.³³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to suffragists on several occasions while in the United States. For example, on 26 April 1912 he spoke to the Woman's Alliance, who were suffragists.³⁴ The audience was mainly young women from the suffrage movement. Conscious of his audience and environment 'Abdu'l-Bahá, stated:

One of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is equality of rights for men and women ... One of the proofs of the advancement of women is this magnificent and imposing building and this large gathering.³⁵

The rest of the talk was about gender equality and the necessity of giving women the same training as men.

On 20 May 1912 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to a woman's suffrage meeting at the Metropolitan Temple, New York, where he articulated the Bahá'í tenet that 'in the estimation of God there is no distinction as to male and female' and explained that 'the education of woman is more necessary and important than that of man, for woman is the trainer of the child from its infancy. If she be defective and imperfect herself, the child will necessarily be deficient;

therefore, imperfection of woman implies a condition of imperfection in all mankind...';³⁶ that 'universal peace is impossible without universal suffrage'³⁷ and that 'when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it'.³⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá was entirely opposed to the use of violence to achieve women's rights. During his talk on women to the girls at Franklin Square House, a girls' school near Boston, on 26 August 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: 'Demonstrations of force, such as are now taking place in England, are neither becoming nor effective in the cause of womanhood and equality'.³⁹

On his return to England at the end of the year, he underscored this argument with the very women who were perpetrating these acts. Mírzá Aḥmad Sohráb notes in his diary for the 18 December 1912 (relating probably to 20 December), that 'Abdu'l-Bahá received many visitors at Lady Blomfield's home, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in residence. Among them was 'an ardent suffragist, a militant one'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá advised her that women working for woman's rights 'should not commit unseemly acts, nor resort to violent measures, such as window smashing, police beating, train wrecking, letter box destroying, etc. nay, rather they should demand their rights with the power of intelligence, with scientific accomplishments, with artistic attainments. Unseemly deeds would rather retard the realization of their cherished hope. In this age a weak person resorts to frightful measures, but an intelligent person uses the superior power of intelligence and wisdom'.⁴⁰ This was most likely not Emmeline Pankhurst, who had attended at Lady Blomfield's during that week, and who, H.M. Balyuzi relates, referred to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a 'prophet': 'He said with a broad smile: "Oh, no! I am a man, like you"'.⁴¹

Lady Blomfield reports that Mrs Pankhurst 'was much cheered by her interview, for the Master told her to continue her work steadfastly, for women would very shortly take their rightful place in the world'.⁴²

The Advancement of Women and Peace

The avowed purpose of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey to the United States in 1912 was to attend the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in May, having accepted the invitation of its organizing committee. This was one of a series of conferences held between 1895 and 1916 that supported the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague and were instrumental in its establishment in 1899. The conference in 1912 attracted about 250 delegates. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the first speaker of the evening session on Wednesday 15 May. In his talk, entitled 'The Oneness of the Reality of Humankind', which lasted about 20 minutes, 'Abdu'l-Bahá outlined the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith, including gender equality:⁴³

The sixth principle of Baha'o'llah is equality between mankind and woman-kind... when woman shall receive the same education no doubt her equality with man shall become a reality. The world of humanity is composed of two organizations – the male and the female. If one organ be defective, that defect will affect the other. Until perfect strength shall obtain in both, and woman shall attain equality with man, the happiness of humanity will not be insured.⁴⁴

The men⁴⁵ attending the Lake Mohonk conference were already committed to the principles of peace and international arbitration and were working actively to establish both. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk was warmly received.⁴⁶ Just as at Lake Mohonk, it is probable that many of the people who attended 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks were like-minded and disposed to new ideas aligned with their own. If so, then 'Abdu'l-Bahá's articulation of the relationship between peace and the advancement of women was perhaps less startling to them than might otherwise have been the case. He may well have expected his open-minded audiences to support a pro-peace, or anti-war, stance and thus he did not hesitate to equate women's equality with the abolition of war:

Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.⁴⁷

The nature of his audiences is significant in understanding the impact and influence on them of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about this subject. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels in the West coincided with the growing fear among many that war would erupt in Europe. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself pointed to this possibility, as he said in a talk on 5 September 1912 at St James Methodist Church in Montreal:

'Europe is a storehouse of explosives awaiting a spark. All the European nations are on edge, and a single flame will set on fire the whole of that continent'.⁴⁸

Many of his talks and discussions centred around the need for governments to act in concert to avoid war, to arbitrate disputes, to do more than merely discuss peace but to find ways to implement it, based on Bahá'u'lláh's principle of collective security.⁴⁹ A major argument put forward by parliamentarians, influential men and by women anti-suffragists, was that women were not capable of defending their country by going into battle and that as a result they were not entitled to make, or capable of making, decisions about defence, which would be required if they were elected to office.⁵⁰ One of the most closely argued statements putting forward this position, was that of Helen Kendrick Johnson, whose book *Woman and the Republic: A Survey of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States and a Discussion of the Claims and Arguments of Its Foremost Advocates* was published in 1897 and is largely a refutation of the claims of suffragists.⁵¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response to this was two-fold. On the one hand he agreed that women should not be required to fight in wars but on the other saw that war was also beneath the dignity of men and was something to abolish altogether, which was a purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings:

Shall we consider it an imperfection and weakness in her nature that she is not proficient in the school of military tactics, that she cannot go forth to the field of battle and kill, that she is not able to handle a deadly weapon?

Nay, rather, is it not a compliment when we say that in hardness of heart and cruelty she is inferior to man? The woman who is asked to arm herself and kill her fellow creatures will say, 'I cannot'. Is this to be considered a fault and lack of qualification as man's equal?⁵²

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements that women would most certainly not sanction war – but seeing this as a positive thing – may well have dismayed many. However, accounts of the reception 'Abdu'l-Bahá's views received suggest that his ideas were welcomed and it may be that he was speaking largely to the converted in his public addresses. There does not seem to be any evidence that he was challenged about them, at least not at the time. This is not to say that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was presenting a popular position on this subject but rather that those who came to hear him seemed not to be opposed to it. The main audiences for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks about women were society women – often friends of prominent Bahá'ís – suffragists, club women and churchwomen. Thus, for example, Maḥmúd reports that on 23 April 1912, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Washington DC, he spoke at the home of Ali-Kuli Khan to a large group of whom 'the majority attending the meeting were ladies from high society. At this meeting the Master spoke about the education and improvement of women and the promotion of unity and peace in the world of humanity'.⁵³ Similarly, a few days later, on 26 April, and still in Washington 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'addressed the ladies of President Taft's All Saints Unitarian Church; the room was completely filled'.⁵⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not appear to have spoken formally to many working class women, although he did visit some of the women who worked at the Passmore Edwards' Settlement,⁵⁵ a centre occupied by young professionals who in return for room and board taught classes to local working people and their children.

Women as Educators

Another theme 'Abdu'l-Bahá underscored on his western journeys was the role of women in educating the next generation. He explained that for women to fulfil this they too required to be educated. This would necessitate a change in the attitude of society towards women and a shift in the way that education was offered. First, the education of all children should be compulsory. Second, boys and girls should be taught using the same curriculum. Third, should a family lack the resources to educate all their children, they must educate the girls rather than the boys: 'If there is not money enough in a family to educate both the girl and the boy the money must be dedicated to the girl's education, for she is the potential mother'.⁵⁶ It is difficult to gauge the response of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's listeners to these ideas: his chroniclers focused on 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself, rather than on his audience. The education of girls was established across Europe and North America in the 19th century so it is likely that most people accepted this principle but the notion of giving girls priority of education over boys was certainly novel and has not been embedded into society even today.

Shoghi Effendi

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 until his passing in 1957, highlighted the significant role of women in the Bahá'í Faith in his letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America on 25 December 1938:

I am moved, at this juncture, as I am reminded of the share which, ever since the inception of the Faith in the West, the handmaidens of Bahá'u'lláh, as distinguished from the men, have had in opening up, single-handed, so many, such diversified, and widely scattered countries over the whole surface of the globe... [and] also to stress the significance of such a preponderating share which the women of the West have had and are having in the establishment of His Faith throughout the whole world.⁵⁷

Further, he expanded the understanding of gender equality among the Bahá'í communities and extended the rights and responsibilities of Bahá'í women in those parts of the world where cultural restrictions and norms prevented women from participating in the administrative affairs of their communities. For example, on 27 December 1923, he wrote:

Regarding the position of the Bahá'í women in India and Burma, and their future collaboration with the men in the administrative work of the Cause, I feel that the time is now ripe that those women who have already conformed to the prevailing custom in India and Burma by discarding the veil should not only be given the right to vote for the election of their local and national representatives, but should themselves be eligible to the membership of all Bahá'í Assemblies throughout India and Burma, be they local or national.⁵⁸

In 1950-51 Shoghi Effendi extended the right of membership on Local Assemblies to women believers in Egypt⁵⁹ and in 1956 he extended them the right to be elected to the National Spiritual Assembly and to participate as delegates to the National Convention.⁶⁰ Later, in April 1954, he gave Iranian Bahá'í women 'full rights', 'removing thereby the last remaining obstacle to the enjoyment of complete equality of rights in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Persian Bahá'í Community'.⁶¹

In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi reiterated the metaphor introduced by Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence in his review of the 'epoch-making journeys' of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who 'expounded, with brilliant simplicity, with persuasiveness and force' the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, including 'the equality of men and women, the two wings on which the bird of human kind is able to soar'.⁶²

The Universal House of Justice

The Universal House of Justice, in a series of letters, reinforced the importance of gender equality and the advancement of women. It offered details of how these concepts applied to individuals, families and communities, and extended the scope of their application to subjects such as marriage, violence against women and the role of women in the economy. In January 1986 it greatly increased the understanding of Bahá'ís about the role of women by issuing a compilation prepared by its Research Department about women, 'taking into consideration the Bahá'í concepts of the equality of the sexes, the role of education in the development of women, family life, fostering the development of women'.⁶³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá linked the full equality of women and their advancement with the establishment of peace and the Universal House of Justice emphasized this in 'The Promise of World Peace', released for the International Year of Peace, 1986.

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged pre-requisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.⁶⁴

In its 2000 Riqdán letter the House of Justice explained what had been achieved thus far in its external affairs strategy, one line of action of which was the status of women:

Regarding the status of women, the existence of 52 national offices for the advancement of women, the contributions of numerous Bahá'í women and men to conferences and workshops at all levels, the selection of Bahá'í representatives to crucial positions on key NGO committees... show how the followers of Bahá'u'lláh assiduously promote His principle of the equality of women and men.⁶⁵

The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 imposed limitations on what the Bahá'í community there could undertake and achieve.⁶⁶ The Universal House of Justice has addressed a number of letters to the Iranian Bahá'í community, praising its adherence to Bahá'í principles and explaining paths of action that could be taken to enhance the well-being and progress of the entire country. Among these letters is one that directly addresses the advancement of women and articulates the principles on which action can take place.

There are, of course, many pressing issues that occupy the minds of those striving to promote the prosperity and well-being of Iran. Chief among them is, no doubt, the critical need to remove barriers hindering the progress of women in society. For you, the equality of men and women is not a Western construct but a universal spiritual truth – a statement about human nature – that was promulgated by Bahá'u'lláh nearly one hundred and fifty years ago in His native Iran. That women should enjoy equal rights with men is a requirement of justice. It is a principle consonant with the highest standard of purity and sanctity, whose application strengthens family life and is essential to the regeneration and progress of any nation. Indeed, peace in the world and the advancement of civilization depend on its realization. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained: The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly ... You are particularly well placed to contribute to the promotion of this principle... For half a century now, Bahá'í women in Iran have worked shoulder to shoulder with men in administering the affairs of the community... And long ago you succeeded in eliminating in your community illiteracy among women under the age of forty... you persevere in your efforts to transcend cultural norms that impede the progress of women. True equality is not easily

attained; the transformation required is difficult for men and women alike. We encourage you, then, to continue to enhance your understanding of the operation of this principle and to strive to uphold it more consistently in your family and community life. You can, in addition, draw upon your experience to discuss this issue with friends, neighbours and co-workers, especially the challenges it presents and ways of surmounting them, and participate in projects designed to advance the status of women, whether by government agencies or organizations of civil society.

Many of your compatriots are eager to see the realization of the universal principle of the equality of men and women. They will no doubt welcome you to join them in learning how to promote, step by step, conditions that enable the women of Iran to overcome impediments blocking their progress and participate fully, as equals of men, in all areas of human endeavour...⁶⁷

As well as generally addressing questions of gender equality, the Universal House of Justice also developed a number of specific themes not previously covered. For example, it addressed a letter to the National Assembly of New Zealand about the relationship between a husband and wife. Among other matters, it mentions while in most arenas of consultation disagreements can be resolved by majority vote, it cannot be resolved this way when a husband and wife consult. The House of Justice counsels, 'There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other'.⁶⁸

The Extent of Equality

'That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature; the important thing is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá regards such inequalities as remain between the sexes as being "negligible"'.⁶⁹ 'The equality of men and women is not, at the present time, universally applied. In those areas where traditional inequality still hampers its progress we must take the lead in practising this Bahá'í principle. Bahá'í women and girls must be encouraged to take part in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities'.⁷⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá strongly advocated that girls be educated, to the extent that girls have priority of education over boys'.⁷¹ 'To this end, the Universal House of Justice has promoted children's classes and junior youth empowerment programmes as two of the four 'core activities' of Bahá'í communities and has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the education of children, especially girls'.⁷²

In 1993, in a lengthy letter written on its behalf, the Universal House of Justice responded to an individual who had raised a number of questions about violence against women and the sexual abuse of women and children. This letter advanced understanding of the Bahá'í position on this subject, including physical and emotional violence, rape and coercive behaviour, which had not previously been addressed in such detail. It explained that the 'use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings' and that there is 'no justification for anyone

compelling another', through the 'use of force' or 'threat of violence', to do something. It states that there is an increase in family violence and in the 'degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse'. It cautions Bahá'ís 'not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence', and to be 'ever mindful of their obligation to exemplify a new way of life', characterized by 'respect for the dignity and rights of all people' and 'its freedom from oppression' and 'all forms of abuse'. It explains that people cannot properly consult unless they can 'express their opinions with absolute freedom and without apprehension that they will be censured or their views belittled' or when 'the fear of violence or abuse is present'. The letter addressed rape, 'one of the most heinous of sexual offences', explaining that a victim is 'entitled to the loving aid and support' of others and that she may take legal action. If she becomes pregnant, it is 'for her to decide on the course of action she should follow'. If a Bahá'í woman is abused or raped by her husband, she may seek assistance and counsel from the Bahá'í institutions as well as seek legal protection.⁷³

A frequently asked question is why there are no women on the Universal House of Justice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had explained that 'according to the explicit text of the Law of God, its membership is exclusively reserved to men. There is Divine wisdom in this which will presently be made manifest even as the mid-day sun'.⁷⁴ Shoghi Effendi confirmed that the reason would be clear in the future.⁷⁵ The Universal House of Justice itself wrote that 'the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of Justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women'. It pointed out that 'women are not excluded from any other international institution of the Faith', and that they have served as Hands of the Cause, members of the International Teaching Centre and Continental Counsellors, nor is there anything in the scriptures to 'preclude the participation of women in such future international bodies as the Supreme Tribunal'.⁷⁶

Direct Participation in Social Action

Bahá'ís often ask whether they can participate in marches and demonstrations such as the 2017 Women's March on Washington. The Universal House of Justice has explained that 'individual Bahá'ís in every country are, in principle, free to participate in efforts and activities, for instance in peaceful rallies, that aim to further laudable objectives such as the advancement of women, the promotion of social justice, the protection of the environment, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and the safeguarding of human rights'. The only restriction is when 'such activities begin to deviate from their original purpose and assume a partisan character or degenerate into violence', they are to be 'avoided'.⁷⁷

The House of Justice has also addressed the practical application of the advancement of women and equality at the institutional level. In 1975 it asked 80 National Spiritual Assemblies to organize Bahá'í activities for women and to observe International Women's Year by developing programmes to 'stimulate and promote the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Bahá'í community life'.⁷⁸ It called for the establishment of national offices for the advancement of women; by 2000, 52 had been established.⁷⁹ It established an Office for the Advancement of Women

within the Bahá'í International Community in 1992 to interact with 'international organizations concerned with matters affecting the rights, status and well-being of women' and to advise National Assemblies on programmes and projects which 'encourage efforts towards the realization of the equality of men and women'.⁸⁰ Gender equality is currently (2018) one of its six focus areas.⁸¹

Bahá'í International Community (BIC)⁸²

After the United Nations (UN) was established in 1945, its Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of its six main organs, established in 1946 the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Shoghi Effendi, wishing to secure the full recognition of the religion, and its equal treatment with other world religions and also desiring to advance the Bahá'í vision of establishing the oneness of humanity, universal peace and a world commonwealth of nations, saw in the UN a means for achieving these goals. When it came to his attention that the UN accredited representatives of NGOs were to attend certain of its conferences, he encouraged the National Assembly of the United States and Canada to apply for accreditation.⁸³ In spring 1947 it was accredited to ECOSOC as a national NGO with observer status.⁸⁴ It had already submitted a formal statement to the first session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, on 1 February 1947: *A Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights*.⁸⁵ Significantly, in August 1947 it submitted a second formal statement, *A Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women*.⁸⁶ The first *Declaration* sets out the Bahá'í perspective that the 'source of human rights is the endowment of qualities, virtues and powers which God has bestowed upon mankind without discrimination of sex, race, creed or nation. To fulfil the possibilities of this divine endowment is the purpose of human existence'.⁸⁷ The document touches on the equality of women and men briefly and only in the context of the family: 'The equality of men and women in the modern community gives the family a new and more powerful connection with the forces making for moral evolution'.⁸⁸ The more detailed *Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women* was submitted a few months later to the Commission on the Status of Women,⁸⁹ a functional commission of ECOSOC. It articulates the Bahá'í principle of the equality of women and men; links the education, participation and advancement of women to the establishment of universal peace – a major goal of the United Nations – and sets out some of the principal social conditions that need to be addressed to enable women to enjoy the full extent of their rights. The document draws upon the many statements made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his talks in the West in 1911–13,⁹⁰ as well as on explanations found in his letters. It included these statements:

- Sex equality is a basic Bahá'í principle.
- The present imbalance in society, which results from the dominance of man over woman, is a dangerous phenomenon and may be considered as one cause of war. This condition accustoms man from his earliest years to the spectacle of aggression, resentment, and retaliation; it leads him to disparage woman's opinions, including her antipathy to war. Bahá'ís believe that neither male nor female dominance is desirable; a

status based on equality of value and worth and expressed in harmony of interest is the ideal.

- Sex equality is the safeguard of peace. Made socially effective, women's repugnance to warfare can create a world block against aggression.
- Sex equality connotes an organic change in the social structure. The Bahá'í teachings advocate for women an education equal to that received by men, since woman is the first educator of the child; and opportunity to pursue any career for which they are qualified, with special emphasis on their role as keepers of the peace.
- Woman... is not inherently the weaker sex... Lack of education and opportunity has prevented woman from manifesting her innate equality of value and this repression is responsible for her less favoured status as human being and citizen.
- Bahá'ís uphold as essential to the practice of sex equality: monogamous marriage; abolition of concubinage and prostitution; employment on the basis of skill alone; freedom to own and to dispose of property; freedom of the ballot; eligibility to public office; right to be honoured by husband and children; recognition of the economic value of child-raising and home-making; removal from world opinion of any sexual stigma attached to womankind.
- This question of the status of women is to the Bahá'ís, for all its political and economic ramifications, primarily a spiritual matter pertaining to the order of truth and therefore interconnected with other universal matters such as world order, peace or spiritual unity of religions claiming the attention of mankind today.⁹¹

On 5 June 1947, Shoghi Effendi wrote 'The Challenging Requirements of the Present Hour',⁹² urging Bahá'ís to associate themselves 'with the various organs, leaders and representatives of the United Nations and kindred organizations'.⁹³ He himself responded to a letter of 9 July 1947 from the chairman of United Nations Special Committee on Palestine requesting a statement on the relationship between the Bahá'í Faith and Palestine and soliciting his views on the political future of the country. Shoghi Effendi responded on 14 July, pointing out that the Bahá'í Faith was non-political, did not take sides in the dispute, that three major spiritual figures of the Faith were buried in the Holy Land, making it a place of pilgrimage, and that it was the home of its international administrative institutions.⁹⁴ In the winter of 1947–8 application was made to, and granted by, the UN to register a group of eight National Spiritual Assemblies as an international non-governmental body named the Bahá'í International Community (BIC), acting through the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada. This gave the institution greater status within the UN system. Today the BIC represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith and its network of National Spiritual Assemblies.⁹⁵

The BIC's first international UN conference was on human rights, in Geneva, May 1948. The delegation comprised Mildred Mottahedeh, Ugo Giachery and Charles Mason Remey. Prior to the conference the BIC submitted a brief statement on the Bahá'í contribution to the promotion of human rights, 'The Work of Bahá'ís in Promotion of Human Rights'.⁹⁶ While

not specifically mentioning the rights of women, its opening paragraph states: 'The Bahá'í international community believes that all human beings have the right to live in a society whose laws and institutions conform to the truths of a progressive and universal religion'. The Bahá'í delegates submitted two resolutions to the Geneva conference, which were adopted. The second of these recommended that the NGOs present set an example within their own organizations by eliminating within them 'all sorts of prejudice whether it be that of race, creed or colour', thus presenting 'a living example of the implementation of Article No. 1'.⁹⁷

The BIC continues to produce a number of statements and thought pieces on a wide variety of topics concerning the well-being, development and prosperity of humanity and the advancement of civilization, both materially and spiritually. Frequently these statements include questions that invite thought and consultation, which lead to new insights and knowledge. The BIC offers to the discourses currently taking place the insights learned within the Bahá'í community through its direct experience of capacity-building at the grassroots. It continues to contribute to policy discussions at the international level, often collaborating with individuals, groups and organizations with whom it may co-organize events, seminars and discussion groups. It collaborates with the UN and its specialized agencies, member states, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, academia and practitioners. It participates in committees and forums at the UN and other spaces. It has consultative status with ECOSOC and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), is accredited to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). It also provides information to National Spiritual Assemblies and to the wider Bahá'í community on a variety of subjects.

The BIC has considered many aspects of how equality can be established and women's advancement can take place, at every level from the neighbourhood to the global. Statements are often in response to discourses and programmes set out by the United Nations and other international agencies. In several statements the metaphor of the two wings of the bird is used to describe the equality of women and men.⁹⁸ The BIC's many statements treating the subjects of the equality of women and men and the advancement of women and girls presented at United Nations conferences, including sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, in recent years can be found on its website.⁹⁹

Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) and Training Institute¹⁰⁰

A Bahá'í-inspired organization founded in 1999, the ISGP aims to build capacity in individuals, groups and institutions to contribute to current discourses concerning the betterment of society. Among the documents developed through experience and consultation which it offers to the discourse on gender equality is its December 2009 discussion paper 'Advancing Toward the Equality of Women and Men'.¹⁰¹ It explores five areas relevant to this theme: Expanding the basis of human identity, Overcoming oppression through the acquisition of self-knowledge, Moving beyond cultural relativism, Transforming economic structures and processes, and Redefining power. Each topic asks a number of questions to stimulate discussion and to share insights.

A significant development within the Bahá'í Faith that has helped foster gender equality is the implementation of the training institute. Since 1996 the worldwide community has been embarked on a programme of capacity- and community-building, stimulated by the training institute, which has encouraged people to 'walk a path of service', to be 'active agents of their own learning' and 'to build their capacity to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the transformation of society',¹⁰² one of which is the equality of women and men. The training institute helps develop the capacity of those who participate to build and sustain the communities and neighbourhoods in which they live. Its egalitarian approach to learning for adults, its ability to undermine barriers to women's participation, its expectation that everyone is able to take charge of their own learning and to build their capacity, has enabled women across the globe to consult with both men and women, to participate in making the decisions that affect their own lives and the lives of their families and to undertake improvements in their communities, often increasing literacy, numeracy and decision-making skills.

Other Voices, Other Themes

Individual Scholars and Writers

There is a long tradition of discussion and commentary on the theme of the equality of women and men in English-language Bahá'í literature. The very first edition of *Star of the West*¹⁰³ carried two letters from Dr Susan Moody, a Bahá'í doctor serving in Tehran, describing the condition of the women – 'I cannot describe to you how they are deprived'... [help] 'free the women from their dreary life'¹⁰⁴ – and encouraging the Bahá'ís in the US to sponsor a girl at the new Bahá'í school for \$1.50 a month, as 'the way to help lift Persia from her otherwise hopeless condition'.¹⁰⁵ Another early example of Bahá'í research and writing on the subject of gender equality is an article of some three thousand words by Dr Orrol Harper in the *Bahá'í Year Book, 1925–1926*, 'The Equality of Men and Women', which discusses feminism and 'Sex-Antagonism' – 'the seen and unseen conflict which exists between the sexes for supremacy and self-expression'.¹⁰⁶

Since these early examples, a number of Bahá'í scholars and authors, both women and men, have contributed to a growing corpus of texts relating to gender equality, women and the Bahá'í Faith, and related topics. Much critical work was begun in the 1980s and 90s. Trevor R. J. Finch's *Unclipping the Wings: A Survey of Secondary Literature in English on Bahá'í Perspectives on Women*¹⁰⁷ provides a useful overview and analysis of such publications up to 1994.

One of the largest categories of literature comprises biographies of Bahá'í women:¹⁰⁸ women related to the families of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh;¹⁰⁹ women of social standing and prominence;¹¹⁰ a few about those from working classes¹¹¹ and the global south.¹¹² Such biographies generally describe their subjects' lives and services to the Bahá'í Faith, rather than to the cause of feminism.¹¹³ Most mention their subjects as examples of the equality of women and men; a few analyse their subjects' contribution to the advancement of women. Some consider their subjects in roles that are aligned to Bahá'í teachings or Bahá'í service, e.g. women as educators, mothers, teachers of the Bahá'í Faith, administrators, advocates of peace,¹¹⁴ or in roles that contribute to social development, e.g. suffragists,

social activists, businesswomen. Others underscore the persecution they have suffered as Bahá'ís.¹¹⁵ Autobiographies by Bahá'í women also focus on similar life experiences rather than on their feminism or how they assisted the advancement of women or gender equality.¹¹⁶

There are several studies of the Bábí scholar and poet Ṭáhirih,¹¹⁷ whose identification with the emancipation of women was, as noted above, remarked upon by Shoghi Effendi. Described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as 'the calamity of the age' in her eloquence and 'in ratiocination the trouble of the world',¹¹⁸ 'a brand afire with the love of God' and 'a lamp aglow with the bounty of God',¹¹⁹ Ṭáhirih was sometimes depicted by later authors as a champion of women's rights.

Biographies and autobiographies highlight the lives and efforts of individuals. However, as Martha Leach Schweitz points out, some feminists emphasize that 'women are oppressed not only as individuals but as a class'.¹²⁰ Bahá'ís researching the concept of gender equality offer a similarly wide range of understanding of it. For example, Schweitz's own thought-provoking 'Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality in Bahá'í Law' in the Fall 1995 issue of *World Order*¹²¹ approaches head-on what appear to be gender distinctions in the Bahá'í writings, such as privileging girls over boys for education, and only men being able to serve on the Universal House of Justice.¹²² She proposes that the common reading of 'equality' in Bahá'í texts may not reflect the way in which the concept was used by Bahá'u'lláh:

...when it comes to matters of economics or government, one is likely to assume that *equality* means *freedom to be treated without regard to sex*. This is the assumption that must be inspected. It is evident that such a definition will serve in the vast majority of situations as a standard for applying the principle of equality.

But apparently it does not fully describe what Bahá'u'lláh means by equality... Equality need not be understood as *freedom to be treated without regard to sex*. A major theme in recent feminist legal critique is rather that *equality is freedom from systematic subordination because of sex*...¹²³

The implications of the latter definition are vast, as it challenges the underpinnings of longstanding traditions and institutions. This understanding touches the essential character of inequality as it has existed in practice – the relationship of subordination – rather than the symptoms and thus can be usefully applied in all societies, regardless of the extent to which formal equality has been achieved. Moreover, it is submitted that this definition is consistent with the Bahá'í vision of equality. Nothing less will enable a practical reconciliation between the public and private lives of women or do justice to the full range of relevant Bahá'í teachings.¹²⁴

Lata Ta'eed, 'Sex, Gender, and New Age Stereotyping',¹²⁵ also seeks to 'assess some of the present interpretations of Bahá'í Writings on the equality of the sexes so that we can move into the future with some degree of clarity', looking at concepts such as masculinity and femininity; redefining power from 'the ability to do what one chooses' to 'the capacity to influence, alter, affect the lives of those around us'; and using the word

‘complementarity’ to ‘denote a symmetrical relationship between a man and a woman, whereby mankind and womankind are “parts of composite humanity”’.

Authors, both male and female, of essays in *Equal Circles: Women and Men in the Bahá’í Community* relate some of the challenges they have had in trying to apply the principle of gender equality in their own lives and within their Bahá’í communities in the face of what they see as ‘systematic subordination because of sex’. In her introduction to the book, Peggy Caton describes the Bahá’í study class which gave rise to the essays. The men were perceived by the women to be ‘dominating’ and dismissive of the women’s contributions; the women, when they protested, were perceived by the men to have ‘nothing substantial to say’ and that their ‘objections had nothing to do with gender’.¹²⁶ Similar to Schweitz’s observations, the essayists in this book ‘face the dilemma’ of how to understand the Bahá’í writings on equality.¹²⁷ ‘Our further development’, Caton asserts, ‘requires us to keep an open mind, to regard equality as a process, one that will always call for questioning, probing and seeking new understanding’.¹²⁸

Feminism as it relates to the Bahá’í teaching of gender equality is explored by Hoda Mahmoudi in her essay ‘From Oppression to Equality: The Emergence of the Feminist Perspective’.¹²⁹ She asks,

What is the female world and in what ways is it similar or different from the present hierarchical, male-oriented social system?... what do we know about the female counterpart and what are possible feminine characteristics which must become integrated into the present social system as it progresses toward achieving equality between the sexes?

To answer this she discusses the feminist perspective in relation to morality, reason, and science, concluding that in these areas

... the emerging feminist view speaks to the complementarity (as opposed to the inferiority) of the feminine character. In fact, given the present dangerous and chaotic status of the global social system, the feminine perspective emerges as an imperative model for creating a sane balance. This conceptualization appears to be in agreement and convergent with the Bahá’í concept of the equality of men and women.¹³⁰

Moojan Momen, in his exploration of feminism and society in ‘In All the Ways that Matter, Women Don’t Count’,¹³¹ also explores an understanding of equality that creates a society with more feminine characteristics but suggests that it does not come about by ‘empowering’ women to act as men do within a basically patriarchal social framework, nor by ‘a mere intellectual assent to the equal position of men and women; nor just the movement of women into all areas of society; but rather, a far more fundamental change to the foundations and values of society, the evolution of a new reality’. While many, he writes, ‘imagine that the goal of the advancement of women should be to change things so that women do “count” in society’, ‘what we should be aiming for is to change “the ways that matter” in our society’.

Other researchers have focused on subjects of great importance to feminists such as domestic violence, sexuality and reproductive rights. That

these are appropriate topics for investigation is suggested by Bahá'u'lláh's statement that, as a matter of principle, men need to take responsibility for preventing violence against women:

The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, speaketh the truth and commandeth that which benefiteth His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next.¹³²

The theme of domestic violence was taken up in 1994 by the Bahá'í International Community at a symposium on 'Creating Violence-Free Families', co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNICEF in May 1994, on the occasion of the International Year of the Family.¹³³ In 1995, Michael Penn, clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Franklin & Marshall College, called violence against women a 'global epidemic'.¹³⁴ In his article 'Violence Against Women and Girls', he wrote that it is 'unlikely that gender-based violence will be eliminated until gross disparities in male/female income, opportunity, and socio-political participation are also reduced. Furthermore, to ensure a lasting foundation for the equality of men and women, the importance of moral and spiritual prerequisites for the establishment of viable human relationships cannot be ignored'.¹³⁵

Although gender-based violence is correlated with gender-related inequities, replacing the present patterns of violence, conflict, and domination with family and societal processes that reflect men's and women's interdependence will require more than the establishment of economic and/or socio-political parity. It will require transformation in every aspect of human life and functioning. It will also require the active and willing involvement of men.¹³⁶

That men need to actively promote and practise the equality of women and men is the subject of another article by Hoda Mahmoudi, 'The Role of Men in Establishing the Equality of Women' in the same journal.¹³⁷ She asks,

By what means will man champion the qualities 'in which woman is strong'? It would be missing the point altogether to think that such a change could be imposed by force, in effect, by means of the same dominance and aggression that such values are intended to replace. Thus the notion of responsibility as voluntary action, of sacrifice of self-interests for the welfare of others, is central to the process of change. The means is, in a sense, also the end.¹³⁸

Psychiatrist Agnes Ghaznavi addressed another issue, which was of interest to feminists, but somewhat challenging for some Bahá'ís of the time: sexuality. In her book *Sexuality, Relationships and Spiritual Growth*, she discusses the qualities and attitudes necessary for a relationship of equality.¹³⁹ 'Sexuality', she writes, 'is a bodily expression of many spiritual principles, among them reciprocity', which 'is similar to fairness and justice'.¹⁴⁰ Drawing on her experience as a specialist in relationships, Ghaznavi wrote

about female sexuality, the attitudes of men towards women and attitudes of women towards men, the sexual exploitation of women and girls and violence against them, as well as adolescent sexuality, relating the Bahá'í teachings to all these areas of research.

Some attention has been given by scholars, notably Lil Osborn, to feminist theology with its focus on women-specific spirituality, the concept of the goddess, the use of male imagery in the scriptures and in language relating to God. In her 1994 essay 'Female Representations of the Holy Spirit in Bahá'í and Christian writings and their implications for gender roles', she examines the suggestion of some feminists that if the Holy Spirit were recast as female, women would have a better position in society, and contrasts this with the symbol of the Maid of Heaven found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Osborn concludes that:

God is God, indivisible and all-powerful. Male domination of patriarchal culture means that men, rather than women, interpreted and expanded the meaning of symbols. God cannot be 'feminised' or replaced with a goddess. Rewriting the scriptures in 'femspeak' is an artificial construction. The true equality of men and women must be within the context of the unity of humankind. That means changing society so that women matter, not changing the symbols.¹⁴¹

Institutional Articulation of Gender Equality

National Bahá'í institutions have also contributed to the articulation of the equality of women and men, in the appeals made to their communities,¹⁴² the education they offer to the Bahá'ís, the guidance they provide on such issues as domestic violence and abuse,¹⁴³ their actions in response to perpetrators and survivors, their encouragement of the exploration of issues relating to gender and women,¹⁴⁴ and the provision of study days, consulting fora and workshops where Bahá'ís and their friends can discuss these issues and share experiences. For example, the Spring 1975 issue of *World Order* was devoted to the rights of women and its Fall 1995 issue to gender equality and complementarity.¹⁴⁵ In 1989 *Bahá'í Canada*, the journal of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, dedicated the whole of its March/April issue to 'Their Cry Shall Rise: A View of Sexual Equality'.

Conclusion

For over 150 years the concept of the equality of women and men, found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, has been explained in a variety of ways to different audiences, from those steeped in the traditions of cultures that deny the very humanity of women, to feminists who agitated for the vote, to women who deny the value of men, and to those wishing to create a more just, peaceful, thoughtful and prosperous society. The articulation of the equality and rights of women by Bahá'í leaders, scholars and researchers, the implementation of strategies, at all levels of social organization, to embed the concepts and to put them into practice, the efforts of the Bahá'í International Community and others to introduce the theory and the practice of equality into social discourse, and the establishment of an educational system that enables all people to learn how to build their own capacities and develop their communities – all these have contributed to making a

reality of the metaphor of the bird of humanity needing two wings, male and female, to progress. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence would no doubt have been pleased.

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She was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in June 2014 for 'services to the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and to the community in Bedfordshire'.

She has been married to Moojan Momen since 1971 and is a mother of two and a grandmother of two.

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Endnotes

1. An ardent socialist, Mrs (later Baroness) Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence helped establish the Independent Labour Party. See, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t19120514-54>. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
2. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence is identified as the 'ardent suffragist' in an article written by Mary Hanford Ford in *Star of the West*. The article describes a meeting between Pethick-Lawrence and 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the home of Lady Blomfield. Ford gets the date of the meeting wrong by a year, as is clear from the rest of the article (compare '*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, Eric Hammond (ed.), London: Green & Co., 1912, 102–3) the meeting took place in September 1911.

3. Quoted in 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London.
4. The concept of the 'two wings' appeared in authoritative text when, many years later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá used this same image in *Letter and Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, The Hague*, Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1920, 7.
5. See Maḥmúd Zarfání, *Maḥmúd's Diary*, trans. Mohi Sobhani, Oxford: George Ronald, 1998.
6. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Hague*, 7.
7. See, for example, *Toward Prosperity: The Role of Women and Men in Building a Flourishing World Civilization*, 13–24 March 2017: <https://www.bic.org/statements/toward-prosperity-role-women-and-men-building-flourishing-world-civilization>. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.), *Empowering Girls*, 3 March 1998: <https://www.bic.org/statements/empowering-girls>. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.) and, *Women and Development in the Pacific*, 9 March 1985: <https://www.bic.org/statements/women-and-development-pacific>. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.)
8. See, for example: The Universal House of Justice, 'Letter to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith', 20th June 2008: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20081020_001/1#89352861. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.) Also, Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, rev. edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, 281; <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/god-passes-by/1#337700484>. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.) Janet A. Khan and Peter L. Khan, *Advancement of Women: A Bahá'í Perspective*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998, 48–9, 299–303.
9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Women*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, rev. edn., Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1990.
10. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 250.
11. 'The principle of the equality between women and men, like the other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established among the friends when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá'í life. Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause'. Universal House of Justice, letter of 25 July 1984 to an individual.
12. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, para. 105.
13. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *ibid*, Notes, 199–200.
14. Bahá'u'lláh, *Aqdas*, para. 33.
15. Bahá'u'lláh, *Aqdas*, 7.
16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982, provides much useful source material on the subject of the equality of men and women. For talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá citing historical examples, see particularly: 'Talk to the Federation of Women's Clubs' 74–7, 'Talk to a woman's suffrage meeting' 133–7 and 'Talk at Franklin Square House', 280–4.
17. See Nathan Rutstein, *Corinne True: Faithful Handmaid of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1987.
18. The Women's Assembly of Teaching was already operational by May 1902 when they rented a hall for Bahá'í meetings (Rutstein, *Corinne* 37–8).
19. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, 80.
20. *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas*, Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, vol. 1, 1909, 90. The modern translation undertaken by a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre reads: 'Know thou, O handmaid, that in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman. How many a handmaid, ardent and devoted, hath, within the sheltering shade of Bahá, proved superior to the men, and surpassed the famous of the earth'. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 79–80).

21. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, From a letter written to Corinne True, prov. trans. Dr Ameen U. Fareed, 29 July 1909. Letter to Corinne True: https://bahailibrary.com/abdulbaha_letter_true_women. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
22. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 175.
23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Women*, 18.
24. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 135–6.
25. See Soli Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools: The Bahá'ís and Modern Education in Iran, 1899–1934*, London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd., 2009.
26. Elizabeth Herrick's name has been recorded on the Roll of Honour of Suffragette Prisoners, 1905–1914: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/ee5a777f-1d7c-416b-a249-c7cb64fcc0a8#>. (Last accessed 22 August 2018.)
27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Constance Maud, 'Abdul Baha', *Fortnightly Review* (London), 91, April 1912, 544.
28. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 252.
29. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 75.
30. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1967, 161.
31. Wendell Phillips Dodge, 'Abdul-Baha's Arrival in America', *Star of the West*, 3(3), 28 April 1912, 4.
32. 'All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 215).
33. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 182–3.
34. *Agnes Parsons' Diary*, ed. Richard Hollinger, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996, 50.
35. Maḥmúd, *Diary*, 63.
36. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 133.
37. *ibid* 134.
38. *ibid* 135.
39. *ibid* 283.
40. Mírzá Aḥmad Sohráb, 'With Abdul-Baha in London', *Star of the West*, 3(19), 5.
41. H.M. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh', 2nd edn., Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, 347.
42. Lady Blomfield [Sitárih Khánúm; Sara Louise], *The Chosen Highway*, rpt. Oxford: George Ronald, 2007, 154.
43. It is likely that the translator for 'Abdu'l-Bahá was Mírzá Aḥmad Sohráb, who is listed in the proceedings as a participant representing Orient Occident Unity, Washington DC.
44. *Report of the Annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, Volume 18, Part 1912*: <http://www.archive.org/details/reportstdannualogunkngoog>, <http://www.archive.org/stream/reportstdannualogunkngoog#page/n12/mode/2up>.
45. In keeping with the practice of the times, only men were invited to present papers at the conference. Delegates who brought their wives were marked with an asterisk on the list of those attending.
46. Maḥmúd, *Diary*, 102.
47. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 175.
48. *ibid* 317.
49. See, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London 29–30, 60–2, 70–1; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 102–3, 118–19, 121–2, 123–4.
50. See, for example, the speech of Samuel Evans, MP for Mid-Glamorganshire, British Parliament, 25 April 1906, in *Parliamentary Debates*, Hansard, 4th Series, 155, 30 March to 25 April 1906, cols. 1582–7.

51. Helen Kendrick Johnson, *Woman and the Republic: A Survey of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States and a Discussion of the Claims and Arguments of Its Foremost Advocates*, New York: D. Appleton, 1897. It was published in a new edition in 1913. See particularly chapter 3, 'Woman Suffrage and the American Republic': http://womenshistory.about.com/library/etext/bl_watr_ch03.htm. (Last accessed 1 August 2018.) ('Arguments against Women's Suffrage'. A similar argument was made by Grace Saxon Mills: http://www.johndclare.net/Women1_ArgumentsAgainst.htm. (Last accessed 1 August 2018.)
52. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 75; Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 34.
53. Maḥmúd, *Diary*, 56.
54. Allan L. Ward, *239 Days: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey in America*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979, 45.
55. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, 85.
56. *Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy*, Boston: The Tudor Press, 1918, 83.
57. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 68–9.
58. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent 1923–1957*, comp. and ed. Irán Fúrútan Muhájir, rev. edn., New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, 10.
59. Shoghi Effendi, Cablegram of 25 April 1951, in Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, 12.
60. Shoghi Effendi, Letter of April 1956, in *ibid* 96–7.
61. April 1954, published in Shoghi Effendi, *Messages*, 65.
62. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 281.
63. Letter of the Universal House of Justice, 1 January 1986, and compilation 'Women': <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/women/>. (Last accessed 24 September 2018.)
64. Letter of the Universal House of Justice addressed to the Peoples of the World, October 1985: <https://www.bahai.org/documents/theuniversalhouseofjustice/promiseworldpeace>. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
65. Letter of the Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/20000421_001/1#361534303. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
66. See Bahá'í International Community, 'Situation of Bahá'ís in Iran': <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais/current-situation>. (Last accessed 23 September 2018.)
67. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith, 20 June 2008: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20081020_001/1#893552861. (Last accessed 23 September 2018.)
68. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, on 28 December 1980: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/19801228_001/1#207456958. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
69. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, 28 December 1980.
70. From a letter of the Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1984. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
71. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Philosophy*, 83.
72. See, for example, letter of the Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2013: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/20130421_001/1#489916485. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
73. From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 24 January 1993: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/19930124_001/1#717196623. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)



74. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 26 May 1971.
75. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, letter of 14 December 1940, in Shoghi Effendi, *Subcontinent*, 193.
76. Universal House of Justice, from a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, 31 May 1988: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/19880531_001/1#807975517. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
77. Universal House of Justice, from a letter written on its behalf to an individual, 22 January 2010: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/20100122_001/1#792353859. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
78. Universal House of Justice, from a letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 25 May 1975: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/19750525_001/1#947875287. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
79. See Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2000.
80. See Overview of Activities Related to Women, 18 March 1993: <https://www.bic.org/statements/overview-activities-related-women>. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)
81. Bahá'í International Community, 'Equality of Women and Men': <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/equality-men-and-women>. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)
82. A time line of the work of the BIC can be found at: <https://www.bic.org/about/about-us#history>. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)
83. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 148–9.
84. *The Bahá'í World*. vols. 1–12, 1925–54. rpt. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980; hereinafter BW.
85. Bahá'í International Community, *A Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights*, Presented to the first session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Lake Success, NY 1 February 1947: <https://www.bic.org/statements/bahai-declaration-human-obligations-and-rights>. (Last accessed 17 September 2018.)
86. Bahá'í International Community, *A Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women*. Submitted to United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, August 1947, by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, Wilmette, Illinois. The text of this document was published in *World Order*, 13:7 (October 1947), 231–2: https://bahai.works/World_Order/Volume_13. (Last accessed 18 September 2018.)
87. Bahá'í International Community, *Obligations*, para. I.1.
88. *ibid* para. IV.2.1.
89. The CSW met for the first time at Lake Success, New York, in February 1947. At that time the government representatives from 15 countries were all women.
90. See, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 283; Dodge, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Arrival', 4–6.
91. *World Order*, 13:7, 231–2: https://bahai.works/World_Order/Volume_13. (Last accessed 18 September 2018.)
92. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, 4–38.
93. *ibid* 9.
94. The full text of the article, including its covering letter and formal registration documents can be found at: United Nations Palestine Commission, Communication Received from National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada concerning the Organization's position with regard to Palestine and the preservation of religious rights: <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/o/0074E155E7831EE3852570610068A609>. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)
95. Bahá'í International Community, 'History of Active Cooperation with the United Nations': <https://www.bic.org/statements/bah%25C3%25A1%25C3%25AD-international-community-history-active-cooperation-united-nations>. It was granted consultative status (now called 'special' consultative status) with ECOSOC in 1970 (<http://undocs.org/E/2015/INF/5>), with UNICEF in 1976 and with UNIFEM (now UN Women) in 1989. (Last accessed 18 September 2018.)



96. This statement is at https://bahai.works/World_Order/Volume_14/Issue_2.
97. BW12: 42–3.
98. The range of statements made by the Bahá'í International Community, documents, videos and news are at: <https://www.bic.org/documents-and-news-s>.
99. https://www.bic.org/documents-and-news-s?type_2%5B%5D=2&type_2%5B%5D=4&field_category_tid%5B%5D=28&tid=All&combine=&field_article_date_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=&field_article_date_value_1%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=&field_language_tid=37&items_per_page=20. (Last accessed 29 September 2018.)
100. Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity: <https://www.globalprosperity.org/>.
101. Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, 'Advancing Toward the Equality of Women and Men', 8 December 2009: https://www.globalprosperity.org/documents/ISGP_Advancing_Toward_the_Equality_of_Women_and_Men.pdf?2ddadabc. (Last accessed 29 September 2018.)
102. See 'The Training Institute': <https://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/training-institute> and <http://www.ruhi.org/>. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)
103. *Star of the West*, 3 April 1910, originally titled *Bahai News*.
104. *ibid* 10.
105. *ibid* 11.
106. Dr Orrol Harper, 'The Equality of Men and Women' *Bahá'í Year Book, 1925–1926*, New York, NY: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1926, 151.
107. Trevor R. J. Finch, 'Unclipping the Wings: A Survey of Secondary Literature in English on Bahá'í Perspectives on Women', *Bahá'í Studies Review* 4(1), 1994, https://bahai-library.com/finch_unclipping_wings.
108. e.g. Dorothy Freeman Gilstrap, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984, 1999; Wendy Heller, *Lidia: The Life of Lidia Zamenhof, Daughter of Esperanto*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1985.
109. e.g. Janet A. Khan, *Prophet's Daughter: The Life and Legacy of Bahá'íyyih Khánum, an Outstanding Heroine of the Bahá'í Faith*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005; Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani, *Asiyih Khánum, the Most Exalted Leaf, entitled Navvab*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2005 and *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2012.
110. e.g. Robert Weinberg, *Lady Blomfield: Her Life and Times*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2012.
111. e.g. Madeline Hellaby, *Sarah Ann Ridgway, First Bahá'í in the North of England*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2003.
112. e.g. Enoch Tanyi: *The Story of David and Esther Tanyi: Adam and Eve of the Bahá'í Faith in Cameroon*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2017.
113. Exceptions include Jiling Yang, *In Search of Martha Root: An American Bahá'í: Feminist and Peace Advocate in the Early Twentieth Century*, Master's Thesis, 2005 https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1010&context=wsi_theses; Rose Ong, *Shirin Fozdar: Asia's Foremost Feminist*, 2000; and Lil Osborn (2014), *Religion and Relevance: The Bahá'ís in Britain, 1899–1930*, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press. Series: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, which, while not a biography, discusses the role of a number of early Bahá'í women, and those associated with the Bahá'í Faith in Britain, who were suffragists, feminists, or social activists for the advancement of women.
114. e.g. Robert Weinberg, *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg: England's Outstanding Bahá'í Pioneer Worker*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1995.
115. e.g. Azadeh Rohanian Perry, *Our Friend Mona: The Remarkable Life of a Young Martyr*, Chapel Hill, NC: Circle of Spirit, 2017; Asadu'llah 'Alizád, *Years of Silence: The Bahá'ís in the USSR 1938–1946*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1999.
116. e.g. Manijeh Saatchi, *Manijeh: Not Only a Change of Name*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2013; Olya Roohizadegan, *Olya's Story: A Survivor's Personal and Dramatic Account of the Persecution of Bahá'ís in Revolutionary Iran*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1993.
117. Including Martha Root, *Táhirih the Pure, Irán's Greatest Woman*, 1938 https://bahai-library.com/martharoot_tahirih_pure_1938; Hussam Nuqabai, *Táhirah: Qurrat al-'Ayn*, Iran, 1972; Lowell Johnson, *Táhirih*, Worcester, South Africa: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982; Ivan Lloyd

Táhirih: A Poetic Vision, Arizona: Desert Rose, 1999; Sabir Afaqi (ed.) (2004). *Táhirih in History: Perspectives on Qurratu'l-'Ayn from East and West*. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, Series: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 16; Janet Ruhe-Schoen, *Rejoice in My Gladness: The Life of Táhirih*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2011.

118. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Traveler's Narrative*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL, 2000, 20.
119. Quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, rev. 4th edn, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 75.
120. Martha Leach Schweitz, 'Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality in Bahá'í Law', *World Order*, 21–39 (1), Fall 1995, 24. https://s3.amazonaws.com/worldorder/Series2/World_Order2_Volume_27.pdf. (Last accessed 26 November 2018.)
121. Schweitz, 'Webs', 24.
122. *ibid* 22–4.
123. *ibid* 24.
124. *ibid* 31.
125. Lata Ta'eed, 'Sex, Gender, and New Age Stereotyping', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 4(1), 1994.
126. Peggy Caton, 'Introduction', *Equal Circles: Women and Men in the Bahá'í Community*, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, ix–xi.
127. *ibid* xiv.
128. *ibid* xx.
129. Hoda Mahmoudi (1989), 'From Oppression to Equality: The Emergence of the Feminist Perspective', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 1(3), https://bahailibrary.com/mahmoudi_oppression_equality.
130. Mahmoudi, 'Oppression'.
131. Moojan Momen (1994), 'In All the Ways that Matter, Women Don't Count', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 4(1), https://bahai-library.com/momen_women_dont_count.
132. Bahá'u'lláh, in *Compilations*, vol 2, Victoria, Australia: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 379.
133. Sara Ann Friedman, 'Creating Violence-Free Families: A Symposium Summary Report', sponsored by UNIFEM, UNICEF and the Bahá'í International Community, New York, 23–25 May 1994.
134. Michael Penn (1995), 'Violence Against Women and Girls', *World Order*, 27(3), 44.
135. *ibid* 43.
136. *ibid* 49.
137. Hoda Mahmoudi (1995), 'The Role of Men in Establishing the Equality of Women' in *World Order*, 27(1), 27–41.
138. *ibid* 34.
139. Agnes Ghaznavi, *Sexuality, Relationships and Spiritual Growth*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1995, ch. 3.
140. *ibid* 22.
141. Lil Osborn, 'Female Representations of the Holy Spirit in Bahá'í and Christian writings and their implications for gender roles', *Bahá'í Studies Review* 4(1), 1994. https://bahailibrary.com/abdo_female_holyspirit. A number of other scholars have also written about the imagery of the 'Maid of Heaven' found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. John Walbridge, 'Erotic Imagery in the Allegorical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh' (unpublished), 1991, http://bahailibrary.com/walbridge_erotic_allegory; Kamran Ekbal, Daéná-Dén-Dín: 'The Zoroastrian Heritage of the "Maid of Heaven" in the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh'; Momen (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation*, 1997; Ross Woodman, 'The Inner Dimensions of Revelation', *ibid*; Terry Culhane, *I Beheld a Maiden: The Bahá'í Faith and the Life of the Spirit*, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2001.
142. See, for example, 'A Letter Sent by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia to the Australian Bahá'í Community, August 1988, https://bahai.works/World_Order/Series2/Volume_25/Issue_2/Text.

143. See, for example, *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies on Domestic Violence*, published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States in 2011. <http://publicaffairs.bahai.us/wpcontent/uploads/2017/05/2011DomesticViolenceHandbook.pdf>.
144. For example, in 1989 *Bahá'í Canada*, the journal of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, dedicated the whole of its March/April issue to sex equality, entitled 'Their Cry Shall Rise: A View of Sexual Equality'.
145. *World Order* 9(3) and 27(1). https://bahai.works/World_Order/Series2/Volume_27/Issue_1.