

SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance

Susan I. Moody (1851–1934) Uniting Through Service

By Gail Radley



Susan Moody heard something outside and glanced through her window. Was it a patient coming to see her? No, it was another man on the street, shaking his fist and threatening her.

She turned away. Her female patients were glad she'd come to Tihrán, Iran, to care for them—it wasn't considered proper for male doctors to examine them. That's why male Bahá'í doctors asked for a female doctor from the U.S. to work at their new hospital. Some Iranians were prejudiced against Bahá'ís and resented her presence. Some didn't think women should be doctors. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Bahá'í leader then, said she'd been chosen for this service. She wouldn't let threats frighten her.

Susan was born in 1851 in New York. Her future career wasn't clear at first. She taught school and attended a medical college for a while. Then she studied art in the U.S. and Paris. Something, though, kept pulling her back to medicine. At 50, she returned to medical school in Chicago.

A New Vow

She also began studying the Bahá'í Faith, and she became a Bahá'í in 1903. "I hereby devote . . . all that I am, and all that I have . . . to Thee, O Divine Father . . ." Susan vowed.

Susan told others about the Faith and led the first Bahá'í children's class in Chicago. She also helped find land for a future temple. In 1905, she took in a boarder—'Abdu'l-Bahá's nephew, a medical student. Neither realized that by teaching her Iran's language and culture, he was preparing her for her greatest service.



Dr. Susan Moody (center) in Iran around 1910. She spent nearly 21 years in Iran, working as a doctor for women and helping the Bahá'ís.

In 1909, at 58, Susan answered the call for a doctor and headed for Tihrán. She stopped in Israel to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "Work only for the love of God and you will succeed," he said. "I will often pray for you—you are never separated from Me."

Soon Susan had a busy medical practice, but she knew more was needed. Tihran's schools were only for boys. Susan helped start a school for girls.

But the prejudice against Bahá'ís worsened—so much that in 1923, Susan learned of plans to kill her! The danger intensified the next year, and she consulted an American official. He called for police protection. That night, police broke up an angry mob outside her home. The threats continued, and soon afterward, the American official was killed. In late 1924, Susan returned to the U.S., but she noted later, "I must return . . . and help in the uplift of the land . . ."

Ceaseless Service

Before long, the new Bahá'í leader, Shoghi Effendi, asked for American Bahá'ís to move to Tihrán. Despite her age—77—Susan packed her bags in 1928 and went. Though weaker, she still saw patients and visited the girls' school.

Susan served in Tihrán until her death in 1934. Hundreds attended her funeral. Among them and carrying flowers were dozens of Iranian girls, healthy and educated because of Susan. Shoghi Effendi praised her "INDOMITABLE SPIRIT" and "CEASELESS SERVICES" and said she forged the "FIRST LINK IN CHAIN UNITING SPIRITUAL DESTINIES" of the U.S. and Iran.