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Ruhiyyih Khanum

Ruhiyyih Khanum was a Baha'i leader and missionary.

Ruhiyyih Khanum, or Mary Sutherland Maxwell Rabbani, born in 1910, was the last link to Baha'u'llah's holy family. Her full married name, given to her by her husband, Shoghi Effendi, guardian of the Baha'i faith, was Amatul-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum. Her parents held eminent positions within the Baha'i community. Her mother, May Bolles Maxwell, played a pivotal role in introducing the Baha'i faith to Europe and Canada. William Sutherland Maxwell, her father, was a well-known architect. In 1951, he was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God, the highest spiritual station that a Baha'i can attain. Popular Baha'i history recounts that Ruhiyyih Khanum's parents were able to conceive her through a miraculous intervention by Abdul-Baha. Amatul-Baha's formal schooling was erratic; she was primarily educated by her parents to serve the Baha'i faith. During 1923–1924, May Maxwell took her daughter on a year-long trip, making two lengthy pilgrimages to the Baha'i holy shrines in Palestine. These were Ruhiyyih Khanum's first meetings with Shoghi Effendi. Two years later, she accompanied two of her mother's closest friends on another pilgrimage, again meeting the guardian.

These trips galvanized her into becoming a dynamic Baha'i youth. She began what became a lifelong effort working for peace, and at 15 years old she was elected treasurer of the executive committee of the Fellowship of Canadian Youth for Peace. By 1928, she was actively involved in interracial activities. This developed into a lifelong passion; Ruhiyyih Khanum was a tireless champion of the rights of indigenous peoples. By the time she was 19, she was an experienced public speaker. She continued to speak to audiences on the Baha'i faith throughout her life, becoming one of the religion's most prominent spokespersons.

From her adolescence, Ruhiyyih Khanum was trained by her mother to travel with the goal of disseminating the Baha'i faith. In 1935, she began her first major trip to propagate the faith, traveling to Germany with cousins for two years. Eventually, she traveled around the world to teach the Baha'i faith. Her father also had an important impact on her education, especially because she accompanied him when he attended official functions. Eventually, she became the Baha'i faith's premier official representative and met with royalty and rulers around the world. Ruhiyyih Khanum also fulfilled her lifelong dream of becoming an author and wrote poetry and other works. In 1937, she and her mother were invited by Shoghi Effendi for another pilgrimage. It was during this visit that her marriage to Shoghi Effendi was arranged. Ruhiyyih Khanum quickly became the guardian's main support and assistant. In 1952, he appointed her a Hand of the Cause of God and began to send her around the world as his personal representative.

In 1957, when Shoghi Effendi and Ruhiyyih Khanum were in London, the guardian died with no successor and no will and testament. Ruhiyyih Khanum played a crucial role in maintaining the unity of the Baha'i faith during the years that followed. In 1963, when the Universal House of Justice was elected, she felt free to begin traveling around the world to again propagate the Baha'i faith and consolidate Baha'i communities. She traveled to more than 180 countries. Three of her most memorable trips were those to India in 1964, to Africa from 1969 to 1973, and to the Amazon Basin and the Andes in 1975. She died in 2000.

Loni Bramson**Further Reading**

Nakhjavani, Violette. *A Tribute to Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khanum*. Thornhill, Ontario: Baha'i Canada; Nepean, Ontario: Nine Pines, 2000; Nakhjavani, Violette. *The Great African Safari: The Travels of Amatu'l-Baha Rúhiyyih Khanum in Africa, 1969–73*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2002; Rabbani, Rúhiyyih. *Poems of the Passing*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996.

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