



Seyyed Mutawwali al-Darsh

Seyyed Mutawwali al-Darsh: Born 26 December 1930 in Dundate, 85 km north of Cairo; graduated from Al-Azhar in 1957; took a PhD degree in 1976 from Al-Azhar on The influence of Al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi's (d.340H) ideas on 'Im ul-Kalam and Sunni Tassawuf'; taught at al-Azhar (1958-62); studied English at Dundee (1962-63); taught Arabic language and Islamic studies at Lagos, Nigeria (1964-68); research fellow at the Islamic Research Academy, al-Azhar, under the Shaikh of al-Azhar, Dr Abdul-Haleem Mahmoud (1968-71); Imam at the London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre (1971-80); Islamic delegate with Darul Ifta, (1980-1995); died in Cairo, 25 September 1997, buried in Dundate, 26 September 1997. He is survived by his wife Fatehia and two sons and two daughters.

My first recollection of Dr Darsh is of a young, agile, turbaned imam going briskly about at the Islamic Cultural Centre, in its old Regent's Lodge building. That was in the early 1970s. However, a personal acquaintance was to come much later, and in a rather eventful manner. The date was 5th of May 1980 when I was sitting inside the Iranian embassy (16 Princes Gate, London). Six days earlier, on 30 April, a group of anti-Iranian dissidents claiming to hail from the Arabic-speaking province of Khuzestan had occupied the embassy and there were some 26 of us, Iranians and non-Iranians, caught in the siege. Tension had been mounting by the hour, the ever more desperate gunmen had shot and killed the young press attaché Abbas Lavasani, and things seemed to be moving fast towards an uncertain climax.

It was around 6.20 p.m. that I heard someone come on the police telephone and talk in Arabic to the leader of the hostage-takers, 'Awn. This was Dr Darsh as I came to know later. He was trying to persuade and reason with him that they end the siege and release the hostages. However, for all his urgings and his pleadings, 'Awn was becoming more and more edgy. He was raising his voice and shouting at him. He said: 'I'm going to kill them all,' he told him finally.

The conversation went on for half an hour and an exhausted Dr Darsh had to say his final 'Assalamo alaikum' to 'Awn. He sat at the Police Control Centre deeply worried and not knowing what's going to happen next.

He also did not know that he had stepped into a mission which had been declined by the Arab ambassadors who

were making one excuse or another and had suggested to the Foreign Office that they better ask the PLO representative to mediate with the gunmen. But that was a non-starter because the British did not recognise the PLO which, in their eyes, was a 'terrorist' organisation. On the other hand, the apparent master of the siege, Saddam Husain, was still in the good books of most of the Arab regimes, and they didn't mind a little 'terrorism' against a regime like Iran. Dr Darsh had made the mistake of going against the Arab 'political correctness' of the time and he was told to go back to Egypt where he had come from, in other words he was sacked.

It was then that I attended a meeting convened by Dr Mahmoud El-Khani who was director of the Muslim Welfare House (MWH), London N4. A number of Muslim leaders had gathered there and everyone was concerned about the prospect of having to lose the kind, wise and scholarly leadership of Dr Darsh. The Muslim Welfare House had a very modest budget, but El-Khani said that despite their meagre circumstances, they would have Dr Darsh at the MWH because the community could not afford to lose him.

But in those days, despite its many problems which had begun to show up, Saudi Arabia was still a haven for many Islamic causes at least at the semi- and non-official levels. The 'ulama had the freedom to act on their own and even ministers, ambassadors and officials had a margin of freedom to 'do good' if they felt like doing so. Shaikh Abdul-Aziz Bin Baz used then to be considered as quite an independent person within the Saudi system. He would speak out against any excess or wrong; and if he could, he would try to have it redressed. Anyone

could approach him easily and talk to him in confidence and privacy. He was not surrounded by several circle of plain-clothes security men. El-Khani approached Shaikh Bin Baz and he appointed Dr Darsh as a delegate (*mandooob*) in the London office of the Presidency of Da'wah, Ifta and Research.

The removal of Dr Darsh from the London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre brought about the flowering of the real Darsh. He used to be an official-imam at the London Central Mosque and out of the mosque, he became the servant-imam for the entire Muslim community: travelling, teaching, lecturing and trying to help or find help for the new and nascent Muslim communities in Europe. He did this with cheer and dedication and no-one ever heard a word of condescension or that 'I have done this'.

He was naturally dragged in or involved in almost all major efforts in the community viz. The Islamia School Trust, Islamic Shari'ah Council, Muslim Aid, The Islamic Foundation, The UK Ruyyat-e-Hilal Committee (Crescent sighting committee), The Shari'ah Board of the deceased Al-Baraka Bank, The UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs, Preparatory Committee of the Muslim Council of Britain etc. In Europe he was actively associated with the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIEO), the European Institute of Islamic Studies and the recently inaugurated European Committee for Fatwa and Islamic Studies, though his illness prevented him from participating fully in its work.

It is, however, difficult to make a complete list of all the societies, institutions or bodies that he was associated with because he allowed himself to be owned by everyone and such list would always be incomplete. He also served on the religious broadcasting committee in Britain as well as on the cultural committee of the Rabat-based International Islamic Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (Isesco).

Dr Darsh's association with Darul Ifta came to an abrupt end when one day he was told he had been 'retired'. This was a couple of years earlier than he should have, but he was informed the retirement age had been calculated according to the Hijri calendar. He was, however, given a one year extension, but even when he had retired from his job, he did not retire from his work. The only difference that this official retirement made to him was that he was

not going anymore to the Ifta office. But he now devoted more time to Islamic work which, besides lecturing, counselling and writing, also included broadcasting. He did an Islamic/Muslim affairs programme on the *MBC TV* (Muslim Broadcasting Corporation) and another on the *Spectrum Radio* in London.

He was never a man of grievance and all his grievances were impersonal, in the cause of the Ummah and humanity. However, he had a weakness for being independent-minded and this remained with him all his life. Dr Darsh did not take part in politics, but he had clear views about Islamic politics and Muslim world affairs. As an Egyptian, he was naturally concerned about what was going on in his 'former' country and so was the overzealous security apparatus of the Egyptian regime.

After nearly three years of absence, in 1994, he took leave and went to Egypt to spend the summer with his relatives. He encountered 'the customary delay by the immigration officials' and which he thought was 'a hangover from his days at the London Central Mosque. But this time I was not fortunate enough to get back my Egyptian passport before leaving the immigration counter as I used to on previous occasions. This time I was given a piece of paper allowing me to enter into my own country and I was told to collect the passport later from the security office, which I did after a short interview: whether I have been to Afghanistan or to Pakistan? Not to Israel, of course!'

'The summer was hot and the media was hot too,' he wrote in a background note for *Impact*, wherein he talked about, among others, the controversy raging about the apostasy and the killing of Dr Faraj Fouda. Fouda had broken away from Al-Wafd to found a new party, Al-Mustaqbal, and he campaigned for a secular order in Egypt. He had declared, more than once, that he was 'against the implementation of Shari'ah, either immediately or step-by-step'; and, apparently encouraged by some elements in the regime, he had taken upon himself to mount a secular crusade against Islamic Shari'ah.

The eminent Islamic jurist, Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi, was of the view that 'the secularist who refuses the principle of the rule of the Islamic Shari'ah has nothing of Islam except the name. He is certainly an apostate. His doubts should be clarified, he should be asked to repent, otherwise the judiciary should declare him an apostate, a non-Muslim,

and his Islamic nationality - identity - be withdrawn. He should be separated from his wife and children and all the rules relating to apostasy should be applied to him in this life.'

An independent academician Dr Mahmoud Mazrou'a was categorical in his view that Faraj Fouda was a self-admitted apostate and in the absence of any authority to enforce the Islamic punishment upon him, he deserved what had happened to him.

However, Dr Darsh observed: 'How can a case of apostasy be decided upon by a legal system which does not believe in the very concept of apostasy and does not consider it as an offence? That's why so many cases which were brought before the country's judiciary were thrown out of the court because the legal system had no provision for dealing with apostasy.' But the legal system they had inherited from their imperialist masters had no legality in the religion, culture or social values of the people, said Dr Darsh.

Even the official Grand Mufti and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar with all the ceremonials attached to their offices and in spite of all the trappings of official Islam, dared not say that anyone calling for secularism, in other words exclusion of the Islamic Shari'ah from the working of the state, was an apostate.

'As a well-trained jurist and former Mufti of Egypt,' Dr Darsh expected, the Grand Shaikh of Al-Azhar, al-Imam al-Akbar (the late Dr Jad al-Haq Ali Jad al-Haq d.1996), 'to be clear and precise in his statement about secularists and secularism. But this was not the case.

'When asked about secularism, he minced his words saying: "It is a stance which calls for getting rid of religion, separating it from active involvement in the society. No doubt this trend of thinking is wrong. It is a materialistic way of thinking which is not different from western civilisation."

Dr Darsh felt sorry for Al-Azhar, his alma mater, as indeed for his beloved country, Egypt. 'This mild condemnation of secularism from the highest religious authority is a reflection of their weakness as well as the expedient nature of these institutions. At the same time it also explains the loss of trust in such authority and its failure to appeal to young Muslims who are in great need of hearing the sound, honest and truthful voice of Islam.' Constitutionally, he pointed out, Al-Azhar had all the authority to enforce the rule of Islam, but a lack of will on the part of its leadership had turned it

into a subordinate office of state bureaucracy.

He had, however, great regard for his mentor and former Grand Shaikh, Dr Shaikh Abdul-Halim Mahmud, 1973-78, and the minister of awqaf and religious affairs, Shaikh Muhammad Husain al-Dhahabi, who was taken hostage and killed (1977) allegedly by elements of the shadowy Takfir wal-Hijra. But Dr Darsh had a different view about the 'terrorist' affair.

'The police did not show enough activity to recover him while he was held hostage, nor did the government pay the 200,000 Egyptian pounds ransom demanded by his kidnappers and then free al-Dhahabi as well as catch the kidnappers,' he wrote ('Politics of murder and mayhem', *Impact*, 10 July - 13 August 1992). 'Possibly the reason why al-Dhahabi lost his life was his public criticism of the corruption and misappropriations in the administration of the awqaf (religious trust) properties. He had done this not from the pulpit but on the floor of the People's Assembly. The allegations were directed towards the religious establishment's most powerful official, Tawfik Oweida. It was serious enough, but, it seems, the scandal probably also involved the Egyptian First Lady and this was exceeding the "limit".'

The duty 'of a minister of Islamic affairs in a secular regime is to save the regime the discomfort of following Islamic policies' but Shaikh al-Dhahabi was, on the other hand, asking 'the regime to follow its professed Islamic policies. He had, therefore, to be got out of the way and that is what most people in Egypt believed actually happened.'

That was a damning commentary on the politics of his country, yesterday and today. Dr Darsh always spoke his mind freely. He was a member of an UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs delegation of Muslim community leaders that went to see Douglas Hogg, foreign office minister in John Major's government. They had gone to raise their concern about British policy on Bosnia-Herzegovina. A polished diplomat that he is, Douglas Hogg went about shampooing the issue, but Dr Darsh would not accept it and told him on his face that his explanations were not at all convincing. He had earlier led a Muslim Aid delegation to Bosnian refugees in Croatia and he was deeply distressed by the callous apathy of the so-called international community. He was moved by the destitution of the refugees, but also impressed by their

sense of dignity and love of freedom.

'A volunteer brought some green onions, baked beans and some biscuit and offered to share with us. It was 9 o'clock in the evening and we had nothing to eat since breakfast. We politely declined the hospitality. No-one complained to us about [shortage of] food. "We can eat grass and survive, but we need bullets to save our people from being wiped off from the face of the earth", they said.' ('A journey across the river Sava,' *Impact*, 14 August - 10 September 1992).

Dr Darsh was such a transparent person whom you knew before you actually came to know him. It was only after he had passed away that I tried to ask where was he born, where was he educated etc. and to fill in the curricular details. He was a much larger personality than his CV. For us in *Impact*, he was not only a sincere well-wisher, he was also *the* encyclopaedia which one could refer to any time of the day or night. That was besides his contribution to the 'First Things First' page and an occasional article that he wrote. He was a fine scholar no doubt, but his knowledge was ready and accessible. You could ask him any question, make an inquiry and even argue with him. More often than not the reply was on his finger tips, including the references, if you were that interested. Yet his *'ilm* and his scholarship did not make him arrogant or aloof, and while he was quite firm on issues, he was extremely polite and humble.

His was a smiling face that brought cheer to anyone who happened to know him. One could even 'see' that cheerful face even on the telephone. Whatever the hour of the day or night, there was always a sweet and friendly *Na'am* (yes, please!) at the other end of the line. He went to his Lord with the same contented look that he always wore in life. *Ameen*.

M H Faruqi

Abdullah Ibn Hamoud al-Tariqi

Saudi Arabia's first oil minister (1960-62) and one of the founders of the OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) in September 1960, Abdullah Ibn Hamoud al-Tariqi, 80, died last September. His slogan: 'Arab oil belongs to Arabs.'

Son of a caravan-owner in Zilfi (Buraydah), Tariqi went to school in Kuwait. He was hardly a teenager when he drew the attention of **King Abdul-**

Aziz by proposing in his *majlis* that Makkah al-Mukarramah should be turned into an independent city and governed by an international commission representing the Muslim world. The King sent him on scholarship to study in Cairo, and from there he went the University of Texas at Houston to take a degree in petroleum engineering.

From 1945-49 Tariqi worked as an executive trainee with Texaco in western Texas and California. After he returned to Saudi Arabia, he was appointed to monitor the oil pumped by Aramco (Arab-American Oil Company) and match production with the payments made by the company to the kingdom. Aramco was supposed to pay 50% of the oil profits to Saudi Arabia. Tariqi discovered they received only around 32 per cent. Aramco was ruthlessly exploiting and wasting what he believed was a precious national resource and which needed to be properly managed.

He was promoted director-general for Petroleum and Mineral Resources in the ministry of finance and he wanted Saudi participation in every phase of oil production and marketing 'from the well to the car'. That was not simple and oil companies kept playing with the price structure. Tariqi convinced his boss, the finance minister and **Crown Prince Faisal** that time had come for the oil producers to get together and deal collectively with the oil companies. Faisal agreed but advised him to hold the conference elsewhere as Riyadh lacked hotels and facilities for an international conference. Tariqi flew to Baghdad where the new revolutionary ruler, **General Abdul-Karim Qasim**, was only too eager to host such a meet. On 9 September 1960, OPEC was born in Baghdad.

Tariqi had earlier been promoted minister for oil, but his term ended after two years. Abdul-Aziz fell ill and Faisal became president of the council of ministers. Tariqi was angry when he learnt that a Japanese company had been 'guaranteed' an offshore oil concession by **Kamal Adham**, half-brother of Faisal's wife, **Iffat**. Besides his weakness for Iffat, Faisal was also getting wary of Tariqi's loud campaign against the oil majors. Tariqi was 'requested' to leave and he went to Beirut and he set himself up as an oil consultant. A young lawyer from Hijaz, **Ahmad Zaki Yamani**, became the new oil minister.

Tariqi called for nationalisation and Yamani said he believed in

'participation' and partnership with oil companies. Tariqi said 'the international oil companies have been exploiting our oil resources for their benefit and not ours' and knew from his experience that Aramco had not been paying Saudi Arabia its full partnership share in the oil revenue.

'When the Americans came to Saudi Arabia the King treated them as friends,' Tariqi said. But 'the idea that a company would always be out for what it could get at the lowest price and would treat the government as a natural foe to be exploited whenever possible never occurred to' **Ibn Saud**.

King Khalid welcomed a grey-haired Tariqi to Riyadh. But when **Crown Prince Fahd** and Zaki Yamani justified their policy of 'extra' production by saying they did so as a favour to the consumers. However Tariqi wanted to know: 'What "favours" did the West do for us when we were drinking smelly water and eating sandy dates? And what "favours do they do for us now?"'

Syed Yusuf

Syed Yusuf, 59, secretary, Jama'at-Islami Hind and secretary of the Muslim umbrella body, All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat, died, 30 September 1997 in Hyderabad, India. He was buried in the town's Sultan Daria. The funeral prayer led by **Maulana Muhammad Sirajul Hasan**, the Ameer of the Jama'at was attended by thousands of people, including religious, political and social leaders and workers.

Only the previous week (21 September) he had addressed a seminar in Mumbai (Bombay) on 'Secularism in India' and delivered a Friday khutbah (26 September) in Hyderabad.

Syed Yusuf had studied law and journalism. In the early part of his career, he worked as a government servant in Andhra Pradesh, but he resigned to take part in the Jama'at activities. He had been associated with the Jama'at since his student life and was admitted to its membership in 1966. He was elected to the Andhra Pradesh zonal consultative council of the Jama'at and later to its central consultative council. In 1982 he was also appointed secretary of the Jama'at.

Besides the Jama'at he had been associated with a number of social, educational and academic bodies in India. He was secretary of the Forum for Democracy and Communal Amity (FOCA) which had been founded in order to promote communal amity following the eruption of anti-Muslim