

The Legacy of Maududi and Shariati

Merryl Wyn Davies looks at the contribution of two of the most influential Muslim intellectuals of modern times and argues that their followers should build on their ideas rather than uncritically reiterating their thought and reprinting their words

THERE can be little question that Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi and Ali Shariati are two scholars who have had a potent influence on the present generation of Muslims. They represent a very specific form of *jihād* which both consciously undertook in their lives. They sought to stimulate and summon their fellow Muslims to the revivification and application of Islam. Through their work they raised the banner of the need and relevance of Islam for Muslim societies and the modern world. Thanks to their writings both men now enjoy devoted and partisan followings throughout the Muslim world, they leave a legacy which needs to be assessed.

There are many forms of legacy which any influential figure can bequeath to posterity. A critical examination of the thought and vision of any intellectual is a process of disentangling the various strands of their legacy. When the subjects are men who were consciously engaged in *jihād* we have an opportunity not merely to examine their ideas about the relevance of Islam to the present day but also extend our understanding of the nature of *jihād* in modern times.

The main concern here is to look at the writings of Maududi and Shariati rather than to examine their biography, for it is their writing which has survived their death and influences the attitudes and thinking of Muslim intellectuals. However there are some biographical reference points which should be noted. Maududi was born in the India of the Raj and began his working life as a journalist when the independence movement was gaining momentum in the sub-continent. Shariati was a product of the Iran of the Pahlavi's and their eager drive to modernise the nation. Both men grew up in a secular environment which had exiled Islam from their native lands. Despite the times both were fortunate in that particular care was taken to ensure they received a thorough

grounding in Islamic education.

While the climate of the times in which they lived was dubious and hostile towards religion, both men overtly dedicated themselves to working solely to promote and promulgate their ideas about Islam. Both experienced conflict with their governments as a result of their activities. Maududi was a prolific writer but he also founded a political party, *Jamaat-i-Islami*, and was its President until 1972. He was imprisoned on a number of occasions and spent sometime under threat of a death sentence. Shariati was an academic, who spent some years studying in France where he was involved with Iranian activists in exile. On his return to Iran, he found academic preferment blocked because of his commitments. His main literary output consists of his lectures, for despite the restrictions he remained a teacher until the end of his life. It is presumed that he died at the hands of agents of the Shah, not living to see the success of the Iranian Revolution.

Clearly one strand of their legacy derives from their biography. The example of men undeterred by the times and expediency in their dedication to the cause of Islam. Both men were influential in the affairs of their nation during their lifetimes and shaped the thinking not just of their followers but Muslim intellectuals all over the world. For Maududi and Shariati *jihād* meant doing: fighting oppression both by the pen and by involvement in the political affairs of the nation. This is an aspect of their legacy which remains significant and cannot be affected by any critique of their ideas. Nor should it be thought that any criticism of their ideas aims to detract from the importance for the *ummah* of the example of such consistent commitment.

Islam, however, is not about particular nations and particular times, it is universal and eternal. The relevance

of any scholar's thinking about Islam pertains to a much broader stage than the circumstances of their individual life and can have influence and significance far beyond their home territory. Whatever the biographical details, the critical element in their legacy is not how special factors conditioned their thinking about Islam, rather how they conceived of Islam as a vision that could become the essential key to resolving the predicaments of society when applied to practical situations.

Both Maududi and Shariati conceive of Islam as a total system which embraces the whole of human life and makes provision for all spheres of human activity. They share a restless, righteous discontent and irritation with the partial vision of Islam which predominates in the *ummah*. The first and fundamental change for which they argue is to think within the totality of the Islamic system and recognise the relevance of the world-view of Islam to the contemporary situation. This is the common platform of their outlook; beyond this their approach and areas of principal concern diverge and require separate consideration.

Maududi explicitly states his starting point in *The Islamic Law and Constitution*: "Islam is not a jumble of unrelated and incoherent modes of conduct. It is rather a well ordered system, a consistent whole resting on a definite set of clear cut postulates. Its major tenets as well as detailed rules of conduct are all derived from and logically connected with its basic principles. All the rules and regulations that Islam has laid down for the different spheres of human life are in their essence and spirit a reflexion, an extension and corollary of its first principles." Since this is the inherent nature of Islam it is incumbent upon those who profess the faith to strive to adhere to Islam in its totality and create the only setting in which this totality is operable, an Islamic state.



Shariati: A sound grasp of contemporary society and a formidable capability to handle modern intellectual tools

The entirety of the system derives from the existence of God as the Creator, Nourisher, Sustainer and Provider of all things. Recognition of the Sovereignty of God is what keeps the system in proportion and makes Islam distinct from all other systems which have existed, or do exist in the world, for the relationship of the Muslim to God prevents the domination of man over man, or the possibility that human intermediaries can claim domination over the divine law and

thereby raise themselves about the level of the rest of the believers. In *Muslims and the Present Political Struggle* Maududi presents his political programme in unequivocal terms: "I am of the view that if I am able to obtain an area of even one square mile where man is subservient to the sovereignty of none but Allah, in my eyes one particle of sand of such a piece of land will be more valuable than the entire subcontinent".

The exposition of the Islamic system is to be found in the Qur'an and Sunnah which also contain the methodology of applying the system. Maududi sees the model of how the Prophet established the Medina state as the

guideline for approaching the establishment of an Islamic state today. His model is reformatory, not revolutionary and rests primarily on preparing the citizens to understand and adhere to the totality of Islam. A great deal of the emphasis of Maududi's thinking actually concerns the personal reformation of the individual. The decline of Muslim civilisation, in Maududi's framework, is due to the ignorance of Islam and perversion of faith amongst the Muslims. As such Maududi is much happier and more lucid when he is writing about personal faith and detailing the mechanism of piety than when he is analysing social, cultural, political and public institutions of the Islamic system. In a sense Maududi is making two categories of relevance for the transformation of society: the public structures of economy and polity; and the devotion and personal faith of the individual. Transformation of the social order cannot be achieved instantly but must be done piecemeal. Which suggests that change is ultimately dependent upon the increase of personal piety initially unaided by structural reform, rather than the constructive engagement of personal faith supported by pragmatic policies changing the character of social organisation which derive from Islamic social thinking.

Maududi presents us with eulogies of the Islamic system. In an ideal world when a totally integrated Islamic system is operating covering society, economy, politics and international relations then all problems will be catered for, Islam has all the necessary principles to tackle the dilemmas of the modern world. The complete system exists in the *Shariah* which consists of the injunctions of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and the elaborations which have become the body of law built over centuries in specific procedures by the *ulama*. He suggests without elaboration in *Islam Today* that the *ulama* have grown out of touch with modernity, and that the *Shariah* as received and accepted by the *ulama* contains many aspects which were conditional in time and place. Before the *Shariah* can be applied it must be worked through and pruned of the accretions of time and elaborated for contemporary problems by means of a return to the exercise of *ijtihad*.

This raises the major contradiction which runs throughout Maududi's work. While he accepts that the development of thinking about Islam has stultified and must be brought alive in the present day on the basis of

the Qur'an and Sunnah, he does not, or indeed cannot, provide us with a method or a way of gaining a fresh understanding of the world-view of Islam. His own presentation of Islam is deeply rooted in the traditional system of which he is a strong critic. He is not concerned with analysing the problems he has pointed out in the outlook of the ulama, nor is he ready to discuss what kind of pruning is necessary in the *Shariah*, how it is to be undertaken and by whom. Rather, Maududi is simply carrying forward a formal, traditional system as his vision of what an Islamic society ought to be like.

It is not part of Maududi's approach to think afresh about the nature of the institutions of the Islamic system, how they would operate in the modern world, how the present day needs would be accommodated and whether the formal system which is inferred from traditional understanding of zakat, *bait ul-mal* (the public treasury), the abolition of *riba* (interest) and so on actually require the devising of new kinds of institutions and organisations. Even though he sees the Islamic system as dynamic, his dynamism does not go far enough to prompt us to think outward from the Qur'anic injunctions to a new understanding of modern day problems and the Islamic solutions which can arise from basic postulates of Islam. For Maududi, dynamism simply means applying the *Shariah* as received and then letting the problems which may and certainly would arise, solve themselves.

His approach outlines the riches which can be utilised to make an Islamic system, he is confident of the necessity and applicability of this system, yet he never analyses the problems we have today in terms of this system, in terms of policy options which can be followed and which provide detailed Islamic answers to problems and needs of Muslim society and the predicament of mankind. He leaves the transformation of society to happen of its own accord. All we need to know is that the system exists and develop ourselves to be worthy of the system: while claiming to be elaborating an organic vision, Maududi actually gives us a mechanical answer: if only we are sufficiently pious, Islam will prevail and solve all our problems.

This lack of analysis is best demonstrated by his book *Birth Control*. Here is an item of modern social policy which can be easily analysed from an Islamic perspective leading to policy guidelines – an issue whose treatment should demonstrate Maududi's under-

standing of contemporary reality. Maududi makes it perfectly clear that to understand the Islamic position on the matter we have to consider it within a total context of social, political, economic, moral and religious aspects. He also makes the significant point that policy and institutions must be analysed in terms of their places of origin. The purpose for which they were devised, and the consequences which are inherent because of both origin and purpose. Institutions developed outside an Islamic framework may well be based on postulates inimical to Islam.

The methodology he outlines is exemplary; however it is not exactly what he delivers in the book. His argument rests on the factually dubious proposition that birth control is a western invention and then proceeds to examine the consequences of the practice in the west. As sociological analysis of western society he gives us hysteria which is fitted out to masquerade as information by quoting indiscriminately without any context from a variety of sources and using lots of tables of figures. Investigation has shown that social arrangements to space births and thus limit the potential fecundity of women are universal and in traditional societies promote the health of both mother and child. Techniques of artificial birth control are also found in all societies, including Muslim societies in history, a fact of which Maududi seems totally unaware.

Maududi's actual concern is modern western techniques of artificial birth control. Here he shows himself to be uninformed about the science and medicine involved in their development. Analysis without mastery of the relevant knowledge is hardly likely to produce sound conclusions and in this instance becomes nonsensical when it is not downright unscrupulous. Apart from a failure to master scientific facts his use of information about social history and public policy in the West are almost childish. Concerned about the understanding of the basic postulates from which ideas or institutions derive, he can yet quote opponents of birth control whose position was inspired by the eugenics debate. This is possible when one is blissfully unaware that eugenics derives from biological determinism which believes that human fate is decided by the genes, heredity governs not merely intelligence but poverty and fecklessness. A more unIslamic concept than eugenics would be hard to find yet Maududi quotes it extensively. He can even

assert that rampant use of birth control for selfish materialistic ends had got to such a pitch that by the 1920s and 30s France had to introduce active incentives for larger families. Factually speaking this ignores the decimation of French manhood during the First World War, and that modern artificial means of birth control were not prevalent at this period. That the book also quotes the efforts to encourage population growth by Nazi Germany is honestly inexcusable, and that it should survive a revision and enlargement of the text in 1962 merely compounds the error. There is little credit, or credence to be given to someone who can condemn so glibly on so poor an understanding.

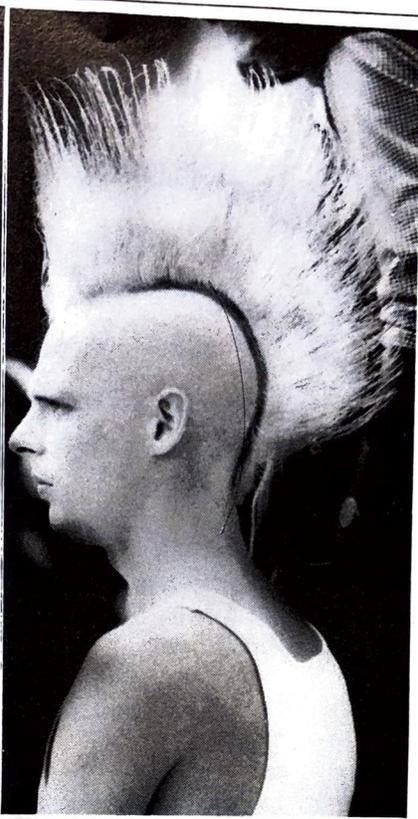
All Maududi's vituperation about the decay of modern western society from which Muslims should be insulated does have substance, but only when it is based on knowledge and not opinionated ignorance. His arguments on birth control becomes totally bizarre when he turns to the Islamic position. After marshalling his arguments to show that Islam takes a view of human nature inimical to the selfish materialism of the west and therefore cannot tolerate artificial birth control as it, according to Maududi, exists and operates in the west, he has to admit that there are reasons which permit the use of birth control in Islam and this has been established on strong body of learned opinion.

Maududi actually allows this vital piece of information to slip in hopefully unobserved and without analysis towards the end of the book. In fact it seems his main concern is with the promotion of birth control as a public official policy. It actually raises an important question: can one, in an Islamic society make a distinction between things which are permitted on an individual basis and yet not allow such permissible action to be public social policy? An entire book could be devoted to this novel idea, for if birth control cannot be allowed as public policy how can individuals avail themselves of a permissible action? How does one distinguish and balance individual right and public welfare and utility? Such is the level of analysis in Maududi's book that vilification of the west and eulogies of the Islamic system make genuinely significant arguments about the practice of an Islamic system into awkward facts which have to be recorded but cannot be contemplated.

This type of poor uninformed arguments and shabby reasoning is not unique to *Birth Control*. In numerous



Western images: Maududi had no understanding of western society and often produced arguments and made statements without sufficient background knowledge



pamphlets and books, Maududi demonstrates his lack of background knowledge and appreciation of the fact that many of his arguments have already been written off in the West and amongst thinking Muslims; some, like his repeated return to the argument from Design for the existence of God, actually been proved to be logically false several decades. For example, the argument presented in *Purdah and the Status of Women* can be summarised as follows: even in an ideal Islamic society, which is free from all moral faults, women have to be hidden and locked away because by their inherent nature they are a moral threat to the health of the society! Such nonsense is dominant in all of Maududi's writings, including his commentary on the Qur'an (at least, those segments of the *Tafheem* which are available in English translation).

It is far from being the case that there are no original ideas in Maududi, rather than Maududi himself sometimes seems unaware of them and reluctant to engage in elaborating them. What he does provide are potent rallying cries to conceive Islam as an organic totality, complete answer to every question and the assertion of all certainties. What Maududi does not offer is any analysis of hows and whys of implementing Islamic reform, or any penetration beyond received

form. In a sense he is offering a traditional fixed system and not a renewed understanding of Islam which will make sense of reordering the twentieth century according to Islamic postulates and first principles. Maududi gives us the glories of form, points to the need for analytical thinking on the basis of the totality of Islam but no substance of analysis which could be the basis of practical policy. That work remains to be done by anyone who would take up Maududi's rallying cry.

Ali Shariati exemplifies a quite different approach to the understanding of modernity. The main concern of his published work is to elucidate the philosophical world-view of Islam and on this basis provide a critique of the philosophies and ideologies of West and East. He is definitely concerned with analysis and his grasp of the complexities and background of western ideology is far superior to anything in Maududi. In Shariati we have someone who is master of the material he is analysing and provides great clarity and insight in the process.

There can be little doubt that Shariati would endorse Maududi's statement that Islam derives from basic interrelated postulates which are logically linked together. However, Shariati's style of understanding and deploying that argument is much more

intellectually rigorous than Maududi. Indeed there is a boldness in his thinking which goes beyond inherited formal propositions about the nature of the Islamic system. What Shariati is urging is a return to the primal sources to uncover a new conceptual understanding of Islam. Not a restatement of traditional understandings of basic postulates, but an altogether fresh understanding of the basic concepts and values of the world-view of Islam.

Shariati is far from easy with traditional approaches to Islam. He sees that the ways of devotion have indeed stultified Islam because they have made a means into an end in itself. The Islamic system is a road, a path, a process of living in society and there can be no more scathing denunciation of the Muslim predicament than the one Shariati gives in *On the Sociology of Islam* which is worth quoting in its entirety: "Now we all know that religion (*madhhab*) means path, not aim; it is a road, a means. All the misfortunes that are observable in religious societies arise from the fact that religion has changed its spirit and direction ...; religion has become an aim in itself. If you turn the road into an aim or destination - work on it, adorn it, even worship it generation after generation for hundreds of years, love it and become infatuated with it so that every time its name is mentioned or your eye glimpses it you burst into tears; if you go to war with anyone who looks askance at it, spend all your time and money on decorating, repairing and levelling it, never leave it for even a minute to go in pursuit of your worldly affairs, constantly walk on it, talk about it, rub its dust into your eyes as if it were some cure - if you do all this generation after generation ... what will you become? You will become lost! Yes, this straight, true and correct road will deflect you and hold you back from your aim and destination. And to be lost in this fashion after having found the road is worse than never to have found the road in the first place".

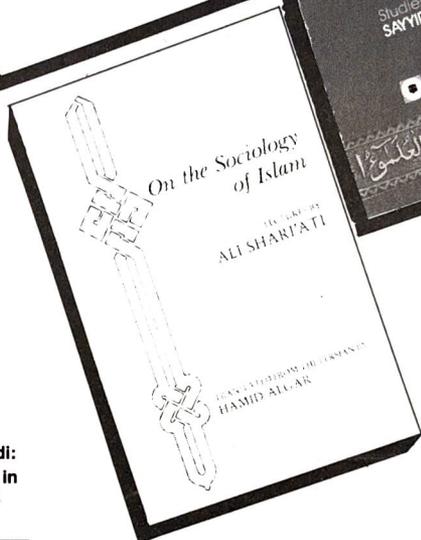
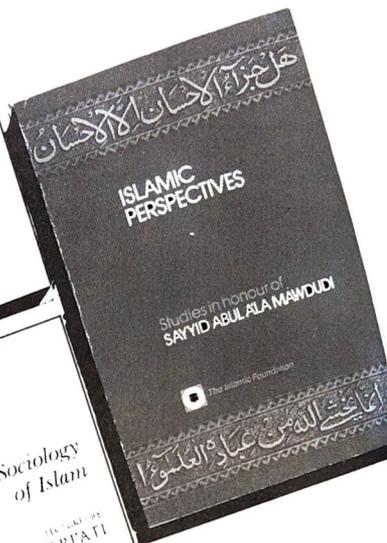
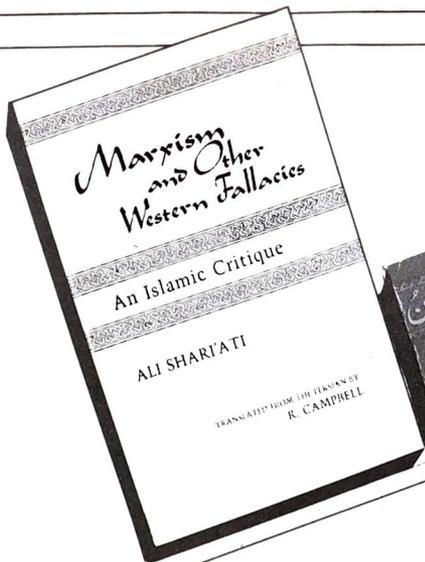
What Shariati is concerned with is outlining a new way of thinking about Islam, which derives its style from Islam and which applies itself to making sense of the modern world, and the accumulated knowledge now available. His main focus is philosophy, the philosophic vision of the nature of man in Islam which is based on the essential acceptance of the intricate link between the spiritual and the mundane inherent in that nature. It is Shariati's proposition that unless man recognises his Divine Creator and

therefore his own Divine origin he cannot understand himself and without self awareness the process of living in society will degenerate into a routine aimlessness which has inevitable destructive social consequences.

On the basis of his conception of the Islamic world-view, Shariati provides a sophisticated critique of western liberal capitalism, Marxism, which he correctly locates within the paradigms of western capitalist thought, and existentialism. His inclusion of the last, the philosophy of Sartre, could be taken merely as a legacy of his time in France. As a movement existentialism has few proponents, or rather few people in the West would describe themselves overtly as existentialists. Yet existentialist thought unconsciously underpins much of western popular culture. It is a pointed insight which many a western observer of the western scene might have overlooked.

Nothing better exemplifies the novelty of Shariati as a modern day Muslim thinker than his critique of Marxism. Shariati is indeed a new kind of commentator: he has actually read and mastered what Marx and Engels wrote and all the works from which Marxism is derived: Comte, Fuerbach and Hegel. Here is no knee jerking Muslim disavowal of Marxism because it is godless. Rather an exposition of the central fallacy and tension of Marxism: that Marx the moralist, perplexed by the injustice of nineteenth century Europe, cannot generate higher order principles which can sustain a morality from a secular dimension without making mankind and human society a function of the machine by the dogma of dialectic materialism. Mankind is denied any free will in the recognition of any higher order principle, indeed there are none, for morality and its recognition by society are entirely conditional.

A fascinating example of how Shariati develops his conceptual framework, is his elaboration of *al-nas*, the people or masses. Shariati notes that this phrase constantly recurs in the Qur'an, the Prophet was sent to *al nas*, he addresses himself to *al nas*, "it is f12al nas who are accountable for their deeds; *al nas* are the basic factor in decline - in short, the whole responsibility for society and history is borne by *al nas*". ("Approaches to the Understanding of Islam" in the *Sociology of Islam*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1979). Without making it explicit, Shariati is constantly working and arguing from an inherently and implicitly universalist standpoint for as he



Books by Ali Shariati and works on Sayyid Mawdudi: The difference in perspectives is obvious.

points out *al nas* are people, not in any sense differentiated by internal divisions whether of race or class, and it is this mass of people who together are responsible for the course and fate of society. Within society the collective responsibility is balanced by individual free will and accountability and Shariati gives a lucid and powerful exposition of his view on the development of society: "man has the responsibility of correctly recognising the norms of society and improving those norms for the advancement of his society. By what means should he do this? By means of his knowledge". The norms of society are fixed immutable laws, which implicitly is Shariati's terminology for *Shariah*, which he describes as a scientifically discoverable set of propositions. While these cannot be changed they are flexible and manipulable by man through knowledge. This is a vision of thinking about Islam, a concept of the notion of social change derived from Islam,

which is indeed intellectually challenging and suggestive of whole new ways of considering the contemporary relevance of Islam. Shariati outlines the task facing the *ummah* as that of an agricultural scientist, there are fixed laws of botany which the scientist cannot alter, but by knowledge about them he can manipulate them to produce healthier fruit.

There are some questions to be asked of the boldness of Shariati's thinking. His essay "The Philosophy of History: Cain and Abel" seeks to identify a philosophy of history which originates from the Islamic world-view. However rather than using just the Qur'anic sources, he takes the elaboration of the story of Cain and Abel from numerous commentators to provide much of the material for his discussion. The view he deploys of history as the battle between the mores of settled society and pastoralists is a common theme in western as well as Islamic thought. He verges

close to developing ideas of stages of history which would sit uncomfortably with other elements of his thinking, particularly the concept of the universal challenge of religion which is the common endeavour of all mankind. His demarcation of the society of Abel and the society of Cain states the inherent moral superiority of the social forms represented by Abel. This abstract, one might almost say metaphysical analysis, however, also identifies the society of Cain and Abel with extant social forms, which would imply that those born in Abel type societies have an inbuilt advantage over the offspring of Cain type societies.

Shariati's philosophy of history remains unconvincing, as are a number of other specific items in his writings. This is less troubling than problems which occur in Maududi's writings precisely because Shariati is an innovative thinker, who encourages and stimulates the thought of those who consult his work. His style and approach are indicative of new ways of thinking outwards from an Islamic perspective which most certainly incorporates all knowledge, from whatever source, which is acceptable from an Islamic standpoint. It also suggests new ways of thinking about Islam. This is the major distinction between Maududi and Shariati: one is concerned with the contemporary relevance of Islam, the other gives us contemporary Islamic thinking and contemporary thought about Islam.

Neither Maududi nor Shariati have visions of Islam in the modern world which tackle practical policy, which of themselves suggest what we should be doing today to make society more Islamic, to resolve pragmatic problems of poverty, what form and how much industrialisation, what kind of science geared to what problems. The legacy both men leave therefore is of a *jihad* which needs to be continued, to become part of a cumulative process of the ummah. They have laid down ideas and directions which can be followed, though with discrimination, in a *jihad* which needs to be a continuous process of thinking, learning and reflection.

Intellectual *jihad* cannot exist in a vacuum which develops ideas from Islam and about Islam unconnected to such basic questions as what we do about delivering safe, clean water to those in need and the manner in which we do it. To achieve appropriate answers to such basic questions fundamental thinking may be necessary, but eventually that fundamental thinking must be translated into action



A wanted child? Maududi's arguments on birth control shows a superficial acquaintance with western value systems.

which delivers solutions. It may be too much to ask of one intellectual that he should do it all by himself. However, we should expect the intellectual community to concern itself with carrying forward innovative thought and approaches in this way. Both Maududi and Shariati have done their work, however ably or inadequately, and if we are to do justice to their contributions we must carry their intellectual *jihad* forward. This can only be done if we evaluate their work critically and without partisan stance. As the followers of these modern hero intellectuals we have engaged in a veritable combative struggle of reputation and status of the hero and not exertion to continue where they have left off in the *jihad* of the mind. The legacy of these heroes is seen as beyond criticism, rather than a platform which, by critical exertion of our own reason, we

can improve upon, clarify and carry forward into the practical realm of problem solving.

Most followers of Maududi and Shariati do them great injustice by seeking a safe and simple formula that requires merely repetition. However, if we are to find real Islamic alternatives to our problems and the predicament of mankind we need to get beyond rhetoric, beyond banner waving and rallying cries, even beyond stylistic outlines and conceptual approaches into the realm of the *jihad* of doing, putting useful ideas into practice, to learn the meaning of theory from the mud under our finger nails. Unless the *jihad* of the intellectual is taken up in this way, and is undertaken to becoming a thinking and doing activity we misuse both the legacy of our history and our faith. ■