

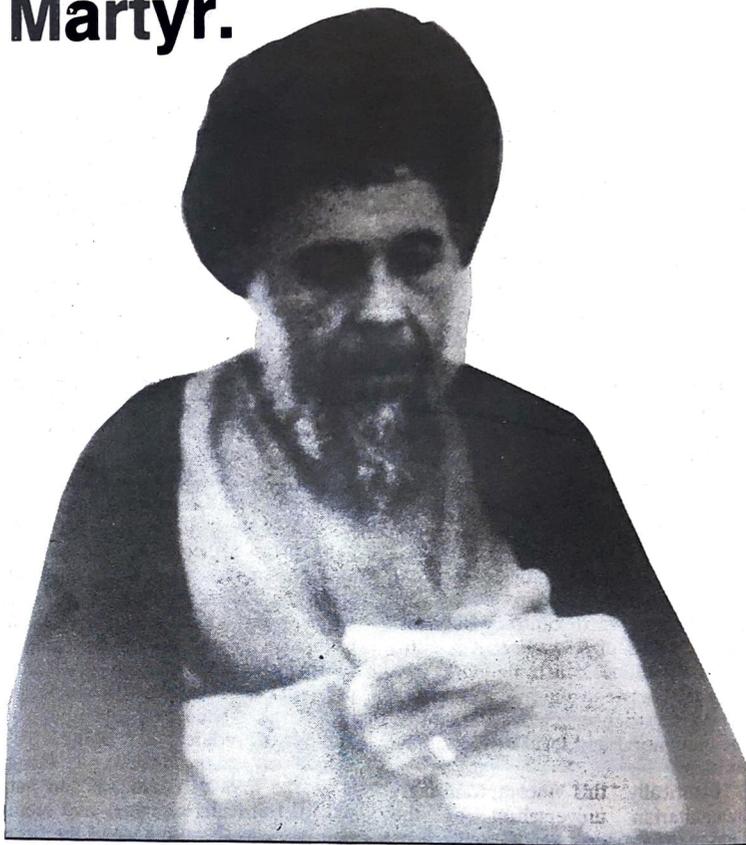
Sayyid al-Sadr - Scholar, Mujahid, Martyr.

"O' the people of my fathers and grandfathers, I would like to assure you that I am with you and closely acquainted with your problems. I will not let you down in your moment of crisis and will shed the last drop of my blood in the way of Allah for your sake." He did. These were the words of Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr to the people of Iraq, shortly before he was executed by the Ba'athists on the 9th of April 1980 in Baghdad.

Born in Kadhimiyya in 1934 (1353 A.H.), Sayyid al-Sadr hails from a family of scholars and mujahids among whom was Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr who is considered to be one of the most prominent leaders of the 1920 revolution in Iraq. His Grandfather, Sayyid Ismael Al-Sadr was a *Mujtahid* and an outstanding scholar of *fiqh* (Jurisprudence) and *Usul* (Principles). His mother who died recently was from the distinguished Al-Yasin family.

His father Sayyid Haider al-Sadr, an able scholar died at the age of 48 leaving Sayyid Al-Sadr an orphan of four years. His brother Ismael, who himself was 12 years of age when their father died, and his mother were instrumental in influencing the Sayyid during his formative years. After a short spell in a primary school, he was to make a choice as to the type of education system he was to follow, it was his mother who took a firm stance that he follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and pursue studies in religious seminary rather than join the state school, an option favoured by some members of the family.

It is said that for a period of time he secluded himself from people living on bare essentials like bread and cheese as did the poor students in these religious schools as if to demonstrate the route he wished to take. He joined one of Imam Al-Jawad's scools in Kadhimiyah learning the Arabic language and basic religious studies. At the tender age of ten he



Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's towering personality, acute erudition and analytical thinking gave a new dimension to Islamic ideology. In the true tradition of a martyr who lives for ever, his blood continues to nurture the Islamic Movement in Iraq and elsewhere in Muslim lands. **Hasnain Walji** his ideological contribution to the heritage of Islam.

had become an adept orator delivering lectures on the lives of the Imams at the Al-Yasin *Husainiyya* in Kadhimiyya.

Even at this early age he demonstrated an exceptional astuteness before accepting historical facts and would contemplate with great discernment before accepting accounts of historians. He was known to take copious notes of analysis and events to assist him to formulate his own prognosis at a later stage.

It was in the natural course of

events that a student so outstanding was to move to Najaf, the then highest seat of learning to study *fiqh*, *usul* and other branches of Islamic studies at the age of twelve. Under the tutelage of Shaykh Murtaza al-Yasin, and other *Maraje* of the time, he soon acquired the ability of deducing shari'i rulings from original sources as well as excelled in other subjects. At the age of seventeen he wrote his first published work called *Fadak in History*. However it appears that even before this he must have started writing a

treatise on *Ilahi Ideology* while still in Kadhimiyya, for he mentions this title in one of the footnotes in his book *Fadak in History*.

He did not consider Fadak as a mere issue of a plot of land, but of principle obscured by personalities. For the horizons on the issue of Fadak was not the loss of land but a blurring of principles which was later to have detrimental consequences for the Umma. It was the introduction of this socio-political approach which distinguishes Sayyid al-Sadr as an innovative thinker whose influence permeated into many strata of the religious and intellectual establishments.

Very early in his youth Sayyid al-Sadr was distinguished by his intellectual abilities and soon emerged as a profound thinker as well as a fine scholar of *Usul* and *Fiqh*. To trace his development it is necessary to divide his life into three periods; pre-ijtehad, from ijtehad to Marjayyah and from marjayyah to martyrdom. Within this categorisation one may be able to slot in his written works to be able to assess his role as a thinker and as one who was acutely aware of the need to bring about changes in society. While it is not within the ambit of this profile to undertake such an exercise, there are certain pointers through the course of his life that may highlight his progress.

It is said that after the death of his great uncle Shaikh Muhammad Rida al-Yasin he did not make *taqlid* (follow) any other *mujtahid*. This demonstrates that at the age of 16 or 17 he had reached the stage of *Ijtehad*.

As a student in the *Hawza* he is characterised as having a very few teachers. Ordinarily all the great *Ulema* have a very long list of teachers. The reason for a very few teachers was his enormous appetite for self study. He had only three teachers - Shaikh Muhammad Rida al-Yasin, Sayyid al-Khui and his elder brother Sayyid Ismael al-Sadr. Sayyid al-Sadr after the *Dars* (lesson) would retire to his room and would be engaged in long hours of study sometimes as much as 18 hours a day. He would not be content to solve the problems with others help but would deliberate and analyse until he was able to further deepen his understanding profoundly and sometimes come up with startling fresh formulations.

The fact that he was alive to the needs of the *Umma* is demonstrated by the accounts that the question foremost in his mind was "What can be done?" His remarkable erudition and vision made him emerge as a natural

choice when it came to offering solutions to contemporary problems by way of fresh analysis. As such he was called upon by other scholars, both his seniors and contemporaries to provide solutions for the *Umma* that was increasingly being confused and misdirected by foreign influences with vested interests. The breadth of his scholarship is amply demonstrated by his writings which cover not only *fiqh* and *usul* but also philosophy, economy, sociology, history as well as major criticism of historical and dialectic materialism.

During the late fifties as the Arab world was engulfed in the bitter conflict between leftist and capitalistic tendencies which threatened to destroy the political and moral fabric of society, Sayyid al-Sadr, with his unique insight, managed to counteract the onslaught by way of his writings. In particular after the downfall of the monarchy in Iraq, when communism was being bandied as an alternative, it was the clear and forcefully argued refutation of communism in his writings that made considerable impact in warding off the danger.

It was in 1959, at the behest of the Grand Maraje Ayatullah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim, Shahid al-Sadr embarked upon writing the now famous book *Falsafatuna* (Our Philosophy), that sought to provide an Islamic overview vis-a-vis the prevailing ideologies and its distinction over other ideologies.

The book had a profound impact, particularly on the youth, created an uproar and was prevented from publication by the censors in Baghdad. Subsequently it was published in Lebanon.

The impact of the *Ulema's* movement, in which this book formed a key part, was indirectly acknowledged by the 20th Congress of World Communist Parties when it declared that a *fatwa* by Ayatullah Muhsin al-Hakim had hindered the expansion of communism in the Middle East by fifty years. The *fatwa* in question was "Communism is *Kufr* and apostasy". The book was the ideological elaboration of the famous *fatwa*.

After *Falsafatuna*, Sayyid al-Sadr took upon himself to challenge the marxist and capitalistic economic systems that have been striving to impose their systems on Muslims. His book *Iqtasaduna* (Our Economy), offers a critical review of both capitalism and socialism and then proposes a framework for an economic system from the vantage point of Islam.

Although the above two titles are

amongst the better known writings of Sayyid al-Sadr, they are by no means the only ones from which one may discern his erudition. As a matter of fact, while the above books were to have considerable impact to ward off the danger facing the *umma*, it is his other works that distinguish Sayyid al-Sadr as a thinker far ahead of his times.

For example, the book *Contradiction of Jurisprudent Evidences* a collection of his lectures on *Usul*, *The Literal Evidence* a collection of his "discussions" and *Studies in al-Urwat al Wuthqa*

reflect the novel approach he could bring to bear on classical and oft commented upon subjects.

It is said that he also blazed new trails in the arena of inductive argument aiming at the discovery of common logical foundation of scientific investigation and faith in God in a treatise called *Al-Usus al-mantiqiyyah li'l istiqlal* (The Logical Foundations of Induction).

However profound and deep his thinking, it was a measure of his ability as an adept communicator, that his message was not lost upon people at large. His ideas had impact at both levels of society. By starting at the level of the *Hawza*, training his students in the higher Islamic sciences and at the same time creating an awareness amongst them of the contemporary needs of society he prepared them for the practical application of his thoughts. In contrast to having very few teachers, he had a large following of students from almost all parts of the Muslim world.

Having made major inroads into the principles and the methodology in the higher sciences he did not neglect the popular level in his writings. The level of comprehension and the outside influences upon his readers was uppermost in his mind. One can do no better than echo his own words to elaborate this. In the foreword to his book *Al-Insan Al-Muassir wal Mushkilah al-ijtimaiyyah* (Contemporary Man and Social Problems) he writes: "There is a considerable paradox between the high Muslim intellect and the general intellectual atmosphere wherein we today have been living. It is even very difficult for many to live up to the high high standard of Muslim intellect without exerting a great deal of hard effort.

It was inevitable, then to initiate a successive series of books whereby the reader ascends (the) higher steps of Muslim intellectualism that may enable him to appreciate its supreme



Sayyid Mehdi al-Hakim: Delivered the historic fatwa on behalf of his father, Ayatullah Sayyid Mohsin al-Hakim

standard.”

It was to this end that Sayyid al-Sadr endeavoured to introduce a series of publications titled ‘The Islamic School’. The series was to be aimed at the general reader elaborating the same topics that had been covered in his scholarly works like *Falsafatuna* and *Iqtisaduna*. In fact *Contemporary Man and Social Problems* is the first of the series, which, in addition to carrying an introduction to *Falsafatuna* has two other chapters namely; “Contemporary man and his capability to solve the social problem” and “Islam’s standpoint regarding freedom and security”.

Similarly, in his book *Al-Mursil, Al-Rasul & Al-Risala* (The Revealer, The Messenger & The Message) he comments in the foreword: “For the last two centuries, modern thought has not allowed human sentiment to remain liberated and pure. Hence the need for proof was made all the more imperative for those who have obtained some knowledge of modern thought and its special method of investigation, in order for these gaps to be filled for which simple obvious proofs would have sufficed, had human sentiment been left unfettered.

I had before me two choices: the first was to write for those who still live with a free sentiment, untouched by demands of modern thought and require only simple arguments

The second choice was to write for those who have come in contact with modern thought and have to a greater or a lesser degree, accepted its framework and attitudes with regard to theology. I decided that the second choice was more suitable.”

In a monograph titled the *Development of Ijtihad* he has envisioned the future trends of *Ijtihad* in line with the possible field of study and the questions that would be likely to arise.

The goal of *Ijtihad* as defined by him is to enable Muslims to adopt themselves to life in modern societies within the purview of Islam. He contends, that from a theoretical point of view it is within the precincts of *Ijtihad* to pay equal attention to both the individual and social levels. Yet, historically efforts have been largely confined to the individual level; albeit not of necessity and hence the scope of *Ijtihad* was restricted.

He elaborated that Islam is no longer the basis of social life - particularly so because of foreign domination over Muslim lands laws based on Islam were replaced by those based on alien intellectual foundations. Consequently, jurists have been compelled

to focus upon offering solutions within the individual framework. The result is that despite a legal form given to make a given act lawful for the individual the social problem still remains unsolved. For instance whatever legal form that is given for banking transactions, usury is a part of the socio-economic actuality and the problem still remains at a macro-societal level.

Unlike many men of ideas Sayyid al-Sadr actively sought to give a practical manifestation to his ideas. His influence was primarily in the *Hawza*. It was through discussions in the *Hawza* that he started to bring about the wider angle in offering solutions to contemporary problems. To his students he emphasised the concept that in addition to the traditional curriculum it was equally important to focus upon the wider concerns of society.

Increasingly his role as a *Marja* became much wider than passing rulings (*Fatawa*) attracting the attention of scholars and intellectuals across the Muslim world. Even before publishing his book of rulings - *al-Risala al-Amaliyyah* he acquired a large following in matters of *fiqh*. Eventually he produced his *risala* titled - *Fatawa al Wadhia*. The style and presentation of his *risala* was a departure from the norm wherein the clarity and practicality bear testimony to his aptitude as a communicator that had characterised both his written and spoken word.

His acute perception of socio-political issues meant that his vision was above sectarian considerations. By the same token his influence was not restricted to any particular sect. This is amply demonstrated by the

manner that he had become a point of intellectual reference throughout the Muslim world. According to an account by the late Dawud al-Attar, a senior figure in the Iraqi political scene and a friend and associate of Sayyid al-Sadr, after the publication of *Iqtisaduna* a scholar in Egypt is known to have knocked on the doors of the *Ulema* of al-Azhar brandishing a copy of the book and declaring that it was no longer *wajib* for the *Ulema* to strive to provide answers to modern economics related questions as the author of the book had already performed the *wajibe kifaai* (obligatory duty on all Muslims until done) for all of them.

The effects and implications of his awareness of social concerns were not confined to the *Hawza* and intellectual circles. It was inevitable that the towering personality of Shahid al-Sadr became a focal point for intellectuals, religious students, political activists and the public at large. Functioning as a river receiving from its tributaries, he was able to direct the activities of all the groups that were striving to resist direct and indirect influences and domination by alien ideologies and powers. He was able to crystallise, encourage and harness the forces of Islam regardless of its non-enclature to seek to establish the rule of Allah and fight *kufr* in whatever guise it presented itself.

Considering that political activities were as much a part of his responsibility as his other responsibilities as a *marja*, he took it upon himself to announce his open opposition to the Ba’ath Party ruling Iraq despite the fact that it was evident that any form of opposition would have serious and brutal repercussions. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the Islamic revolution in Iraq had its form from his contribution in the ideological field and continues to evolve having been strengthened by his blood which he felt had to be sacrificed to heighten the awareness that it mattered not whether one was a philosopher or a religious scholar or a *marjaa*, no sacrifice was too great to remove oppression upon Muslims.

Sayyid al-Sadr was a man of many dimensions. He was a man of his times and more. He was ahead of his times. The only fitting tribute to a scholar, a philosopher, a social reformer, a political leader, a thinker, *Marjaa* and above all a martyr, can be paid by honouring the contribution made by him to the heritage of Islam and enriching his novel insights and thoughts.