

The Quiet Revolutionary

OSTAD Muhammad-Taqi Shariati Mazinani, father of Dr. Ali Shariati, and a prominent Islamic scholar in his own right, passed away in Iran on April 20th. He had been ill for some time.

Ostad Shariati's had been a life dedicated towards the teaching of Islam, and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including President Khamenei, Ayatullah Husain Ali Montazeri and Hujjat ul-Islam Rafsanjani were quick to pay tribute to him and offer condolences to his family.

Born in Mazinan, Khorassan, Ostad Shariati went on to study at the *Houzah Ilmiyah* in Mashhad, Iran's largest religious town, having been inspired towards religious studies by his family. This period of study was a particularly difficult time for Shariati and his fellow students as Shah Reza Pahlavi systematically pursued his policy of wiping the influence of Islam from Iran and instituting secular education in schools and colleges. As part of this policy the *Houzah Ilmiyah* was faced with serious oppressive measures designed to break the will of the students and drive the teachers into exile or retirement. Although the *Houzah*, and others like it were not destroyed, they were forced to take up a position in the wings of the Iranian education system as the new secular schools came to dominate, and most Iranian youngsters pursued a curriculum which was totally at odds with what had traditionally been taught throughout the country and which alienated them from their own Islamic roots and culture. Shariati realised the immense threat that this posed to Islam in his country and made particular efforts to make contact with secular intellectuals, bureaucrats, civil servants and army officers with a view to conveying his Islamic ideas to a strata which had been adversely influenced by alien ideologies. In addition, leaving the traditional religious schools behind him, he went to teach in the modern secular establishments in order to make similar fruitful contact with the youth. In 1932 Shariati joined the Ministry of Culture and started work as a deputy-headmaster of a secondary school in Mashhad.

During the period following the second world war, during which time the Soviet Red Army had occupied part of northern Iran, the party which most came to influence intellectuals and students was the communist

Tudeh Party financed and motivated by the Soviet Union. It was in response to the growing influence of the Tudeh Party that Shariati established the *Kanoon-e Nashr-e Haghayigh-e Islami* which was to act as a forum to promote Islamic ideas and awareness. Holding weekly sessions, participants were encouraged to view the Quran as not just a historical document but as a code which was just as applicable to twentieth century



living and which could help to offer solutions for many modern social and political ills. Before long, large audiences were attracted to these gatherings and it became clear to members of the Tudeh and other anti-Islamic groups that a powerful doctrine was being disseminated which threw an entirely new light on religious doctrines. Many Islamic thinkers were moulded by the work of the centre which was able to organize effective resistance to anti-Islamic movements throughout the province of Khorassan. Ali Shariati, the Ostad's son later to distinguish himself as a prominent academic and scholar was greatly inspired by the work at this centre.

On the advice of Ayatallah Kashani, the elder Shariati stood as a candidate for the Iranian parliament in 1952. He had wanted to represent Mashhad but in the run up to the election due to the conspiring of the Tudeh Party and various Government agents elections in certain areas were called off, including Mashhad. Before such elections could be held there, the Government

of Dr. Mossadegh was overthrown in a military coup.

Shariati had been close to (Martyr) Ayatollah Murtada Mottahari who invited him in 1966 to give a series of lectures in the newly established Hoseinieh Ershad in Tehran, a religious centre which was to play a crucial role in crystallising the Islamic movement amongst the country's youth. He was originally invited to lecture for a couple of months but due to the popularity of his teachings this period extended to two years. He was widely regarded as an expert Quranic commentator and interpreter of Najul Balagha, and had a wide knowledge of the history of Islam.

But one of the greatest achievements of Ostad Shariati was the way in which he educated and directed his son Ali, in the fight for Islam. Ali Shariati's ideas played a key role in laying the foundation for the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Thousands of would be Marxists within Iran turned towards Islam as a direct result of the teachings, lectures and writings of Ali Shariati. It was unfortunate that following the death of Ali Shariati just prior to the Islamic Revolution, that the Mujahideen Khalq used his name to support their campaign against the infant government and against the ulema. It was as a result of this that the Shariati name came to be maligned and his work subjected to much criticism. And it was also as a consequence of this that Muslim intellectuals within Iran were viewed with increasing suspicion and discomfiture. It is however a healthy sign that Iran's leaders saw fit to pay unreserved tribute to Ali Shariati's father following his death, and this infact coincides with a growing effort to bring Ali Shariati's works back out of the shadows. Shariati's articles are once again appearing, press coverage of him is becoming more favourable and recognition is at last being paid to the great role he played in inspiring the Islamic Revolution. And it was the senior Shariati, Ostad, who was the pivotal force in enabling this re-evaluation to take place. An important interview with him was published in the widely circulated *Kayhan Farhangi* at the beginning of 1985. Proving to be as influential as he had in his earlier years, this publication was to mark an important point in fostering favourable recognition of his son's work.