

"GOD ALONE IS GREAT"

An Interview With Azam Taleghani

Azam Taleghani



Only a few days before Ayatollah Taleghani passed away I interviewed his daughter, 'Azam Taleghani at her home in Tehran. There were three people with me, Salma, my wife with her camera, Hasan, an interpreter and Hashemi, the driver of our car. Sr. 'Azam spoke in Farsi and Hasan translated as best as he could. The translation could not convey her animated style, her flashing eyes and the spirit and enthusiasm of her personality. Even without saying anything she could convey the aspirations and the ideals of the Islamic revolution. She was dressed plainly, covering herself with a cotton *chador*, no sign of make-up on her face, hands or feet. Her home was decorated simply, even austere. She is married, has child-

ren, but has retained her maiden name. The Islamic struggle is everything for her. She has endured tremendous hardships including prison and torture and has made great sacrifices for the Islamic revolution. She is a top leader of Iran's militant women and yet lacks all pretensions of her own importance. When she offered us tea and spoke to us she made no distinctions between our lower-middle-class driver and our upper-middle class interpreter. She spoke to both of them, sitting near them, as if they were her equals. (I was impressed by this denial of class distinctions, because in my country, Pakistan, the driver would not have made it into the living room or have been served so graciously by the hostess.) It remains to be seen if revolutionaries like 'Azam Taleghani can use their sense of equality to transform Iran's socio-economic system in which the class system continues to survive.

K. Tell me about yourself, your background, education, your role in the revolution.

A. It is not important.

K. I have come from America where people give great importance not just to what is being said but to who is saying it. So you must dwell on the personal (*shakhsi*) aspects.

A. It does not matter. God knows our actions. He will decide, or people will write about them when we are gone. . . If you must have this information, *Jamhuriya-Islami* newspaper has pub-

lished a biographical sketch. You can look that up.

K. Incredible though it might sound to you there are attacks on Iran in the American media, television, radio, newspapers, almost every day. They say women in Iran have lost their rights under the Islamic government. What is your response to that.

A. Iranian women began to get their rights with the Islamic revolution. We have a long way to go to get all that Islam gave us. But we are moving now in all areas of life, social, cultural, political, economic.

K. What do you say about the propaganda against Iran?

A. Tell the Iranian students in America that this is part of the struggle against Zionism and Imperialism . . . Tell them also that we want to get hold of Mahnaz Abkhami of the so-called "Voice of Iranian women" (under the Shah). She escaped to the U.S. They should help us to put her on trial.

K. What is the future of the women's movement in Iran?

A. The future is in the hands of the women themselves now. We have to educate ourselves and fulfill our responsibilities. We are strong enough to get our rights provided we continue the struggle. We are busy all the time in this struggle to stand on our own feet.



Azam Taleghani mourning her illustrious father's untimely death.

K. Are Muslim women an active force in Iran's universities?

A. At the universities Islamically-oriented women are struggling against alien anti-Islamic ideologies. It is their constant endeavor to answer attacks against Islam. Also these women are involved in social and economic reconstruction efforts all over Iran. They are trying to reach their less-fortunate uneducated sisters, to help them understand the rights Islam gives them and to help them stand on their own feet.

K. How would you describe the influence of Dr. Ali Shariati's writings on women in the universities?

A. You should not restrict yourself to asking questions only about women just because I am a woman. Ask about both men and women. I can talk about both.

K. All right, what sort of influence did Shariati's writings have on both men and women?

A. Muslims have understood from him that revolution is everybody's responsibility. Nobody is going to make revolution for us. Each of us, whether we are men or women, have

to make the revolution. This participation and effort has to come from all the people. We have to stop being mere observers of what's going on.

K. What message would you like to convey to Muslims in the U.S. and in Pakistan?

A. First tell me why you did not have publications about the revolution when the struggle against the ex-Shah was going on. Did Muslims publish such things at that time?

*K. Most Muslims have been brought up to see Islam in traditional terms, not as a religion of revolution. You are quite right, unfortunately, that Muslims were not helped by their leaders to understand the Islamic Revolution. **New Trend** magazine, however, is an exception, and it did publish Ayatollah Khomeini's message, an account of Ali Shariati's martyrdom, the curfew in Isfahan and the Sept. 8, 1978 massacre in Tehran, at the time these events took place. (**Islamic Revolution** magazine did not exist at that time.)*

A. My call to the Muslims in other countries is summed up in the message of "Allaho Akbar" (God alone is

Great). With this call Muslims should make revolution in their countries. Unless they accept Allah as the real ruler of their lives, they have not accepted the basis of Islamic revolution.

K. Why did you not get elected to the Assembly of Experts? Women who can speak out are needed there.

A. I was too busy to get an election program organized. We have to work at the people's level. The push from the mass level will bring about the real changes.

K. Thank you for your time and hospitality. Please give my salams to your father (Ayatollah Taleghani).

This interview is part of a series of features by Kaukab Siddique, the first two of which appeared in our October and November issues. The conclusion will be published, Insha Allah in our January 1980 issue.

