



KASRAVI, AḤMAD II. ASSASSINATION

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ii. Assassination of Kasravi

The occupation of Iran by Allied forces (September 1941) and the forced abdication of Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-41) inadvertently encouraged limited social and political freedoms, which allowed publication of books and newspapers and formation of active social, political, and religious organizations previously prohibited. These formed all across Iran, and Islamic magazines and publications flourished. The surge in activities of Islamic groups and the intensification of the rhetoric of mullahs at mosques coincided with the escalation and sharpening of Kasravi's criticism of the foundation of Shi'ite concepts and values.

During the period of late 1941 to mid-1945 Kasravi wrote some of his sharpest critique of the clergy and tenets of Shi'ism, Bahaism and Sufism. He became the embodiment of intellectual revision of official religious and cultural thought and the self-appointed, outspoken adversary of the resurgent Islamic movement. Kasravi let it be known through seventeen books and pamphlets, as well as numerous articles in his newspaper *Parčam*, that he believed the renaissance of political Islam and attempts to hold the government to Islamic law (*šari'a*) were hostile to the modern values and institutions espoused by the



Constitutional Revolution of 1906, in which Kasravi was a young participant (Kasravi, 1990, pp. 30-33; see above, i, and below, v).

Many instances of clashes between animated Muslim crowds and supporters of Kasravi in Tabriz, Rasht, and other cities were reported and documented by *Parčam*. Until spring of 1945, however, no direct attempts were made on Kasravi's life. This task fell to an unknown orator and seminary student (*ṭalaba*) named Nawwāb Ṣafawī (q.v.). Born Sayyed Mojtabā Mirlawḥī in Kāniābād of Tehran (1924), he had attended seminary school in Najaf for 6 to 9 months after receiving a high school diploma from the German Technical School in Tehran (*Madrasa-ye ṣan'ati*). Nawwāb had seen or heard of Kasravi's *Šī'gari* in Najaf and observed the clergy's disdain for this and other works of Kasravi.

Upon his return from Najaf in spring of 1945, Nawwāb confronted Kasravi for the first time during one of his scheduled discussion groups (*jalasāt*) before embarking on a failed assassination attempt. On 18 April 1945, Nawwāb and his associate Ḳoršīdi attacked Kasravi at Hešmat-al-Dawla Square in Tehran (*Eṭṭelā'āt*, 18 April 1945; *Rahbar*, 18 April 1945; Pākdāman, pp. 42-43). The assailants used knives and a gun purchased with money donated by Ayatollah Ḥājj Shaikh Moḥammad-Ḥasan Ṭālaqāni, the imam of Sayf-al-Dawla Mosque in Tehran (M. Amini, 2011, p. 67; Qayṣari, p. 36). Kasravi was seriously injured and taken to hospital. His assailants were jailed for a few days and released on bonds provided by a wealthy bazaar merchant (Pākdāman, p. 43; M. Amini, 2011, p. 69).

The inconclusive and less than truthful report by the police on 22 April accepted Nawwāb's claim that he had acted in self-defense in using a knife and removing the gun from Kasravi's hand. The medical statement quoted in the police report, however, indicated that "injuries on Kasravi's back were caused by gunshot" (*Eṭṭelā'āt*, 22 April 1945; *Rahbar*, 25 April 1945). Kasravi denied and ridiculed the police findings and stated his own version of the event to the press (*Irān-e mā*, 24 April 1945).

The report and the subsequent release of Nawwāb angered supporters of Kasravi and buoyed the ulama (*'olamā'*) and Shi'ite activists who had vigorously complained against Kasravi to the government in the past and demanded a cease and desist order against his publications. Kasravi had documented some of these complaints in a lengthy open letter to the prime minister, Sahām Solṭān Bayāt, entitled "Government should respond to us"



(Kasravi, 1944). Some of the ulama from Kasravi's birthplace of Tabriz had gone further and demanded that Kasravi be tried and executed for the burning of the Holy Qur'an and for blasphemy (M. Amini, 2011, pp. 21-22).

A few weeks after the failed assassination attempt, Sayyed Ruḥ-Allāh Musawī al-Ḥosaynī (later Ayatollah and Imam Khomeini) demanded that young martyrs for Islam respond to "this illiterate Tabrizi," a reference to Kasravi's birthplace (Emām Komeyni, I, p. 21).

Upon his release from jail, Nawwāb issued a declaration titled *Kun o enteqām* ("Blood and revenge"; D. Amini, p. 77; M. Amini, 2003, p. 101) and announced the formation of *Fedā'iān-e Eslām*, a Shi'ite fundamentalist group originally formed among young seminary students and zealot Muslims (Erāqī, p. 27; M. Amini, 2003, pp. 122-30; Vāḥedi, 1991, pp. 9-21; Ġafuri, 1996, p. 216). Soon after, with the encouragement of Prime Minister Moḥsen Ṣadr (Ṣadr-al-Ašrāf), who was a mojtahed in civilian attire, the minister of education announced a new legal action against Kasravi, claiming that his books were against the *šari'a* and a rarely used legal decree of 1922 (Kasravi, "Nāma-ye Āqā-ye Kasravi be vazir-e dādgostari," in *Irān-e mā*, 27 February 1946). As legal action against Kasravi was proceeding, the rhetoric by the clergy and their supporters against "blasphemous" Kasravi escalated. In one such event, some four hundred mullahs and seminary students gathered in a mosque in Kāniābād neighborhood on 22 December 1945 and demanded that Kasravi be killed and his house ransacked, only to be dissuaded by Ayatollah Moḥammad Behbahāni, a leading mojtahed in Tehran (*Irān-e mā*, 13 March 1946).

Kasravi was assassinated during a court proceeding inside the Palace of Justice (Kāk-e dādgostari). In the early hours of 11 March 1946, a group of Fedā'iān led by the Emāmi brothers (Sayyed Ḥosayn and Sayyed 'Ali) entered the courthouse and brutally murdered Kasravi and his long-time assistant, Sayyed Moḥammad- Taqī Ḥaddādpur, using knives and guns (*Irān-e mā*, 12 March 1946). It is claimed that the date, time, and location of proceedings, which were not public knowledge, were leaked to Fedā'iān by the father of the judicial examiner (*bāzpors*; Farzāna, 1973, p. 46).

Some of the assailants were never charged (*Emād*, 1/2, 1998, p. 109). Those who were arrested, including the Emāmi brothers, claimed self-defense and accused Kasravi of having initiated the confrontation using a gun (*ibid.*). Grand Ayatollah Ḥosayn Qomi, who was the second ranking source of emulation (*marja'*) in Najaf at the time, sent a telegram from Najaf to Prime



Minister Aḥmad Qavām demanding the immediate release of the jailed assailants and expressed his dismay at government inaction in recognition of the heroism of Kasravi's assailants (D. Amini, p. 127). They were all released by the Qavām government under pressure from ulama and religious leaders and influential merchants, after a short trial (Amir- 'Abd-Allāh Karbāsčian, *Šāhed-e yārān*, 16 March 2007, p. 66).

With the exception of a few articles in left-leaning newspapers, Kasravi's murder was treated with silence by secular intellectuals and the press. But the response of religious groups and ulama was euphoric (Šarif Rāzi, I, 1954, pp. 200-201). Nawwāb and his Fedā'iān group were treated as heroes of Islam and the *šari'a* (D. Amini, p. 127; Šarif Rāzi, p. 109).

Although some historians believe that the Fedā'iān acted upon a *fatwā* (edict) from Ayatollah 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Amini (see Pākdāman, pp. 18-19), no *fatwā* or claims thereof has ever surfaced. Ayatollah Qomi declared that no *fatwā* was needed and the Fedā'iān's action was on a par with the essential practices of Islam (*foru'*), such as daily prayers (*namāz*) and fasting (*ruza*; D. Amini, p. 131). The bodies of the victims, covered with deep wounds, were, without autopsy, taken on the evening of their assassination by Kasravi relatives to the Zāhir-al-Dawla cemetery in Šemirān, near Tehran. The Sufi custodians of the cemetery refused to give permission for the burial on the ground of Kasravi's anti-Sufi ideas and practices. Then the bodies were taken and buried at a spot in the foothills of Emānzāda Šāleḥ, called Ābak (telephone interview with Amir Kojoori, Kasravi's grandson, in Los Angeles, Calif. on 14 March 2012).

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