



ARĀNĪ, TAQĪ

ARĀNĪ, TAQĪ (1281-1318 Š./1902-40), Iranian Marxist and intellectual initiator of the communist Tudeh Party.

i. Biography.

ii. Political thoughts and activities.

i. Biography

Dr. Tāqī Arānī was born in Tabrīz the son of a civil servant, raised in Tehran, and educated at the Dār al Fonūn and the Medical College. During his college years, he was an ardent nationalist: he admired the ancient civilization of Iran, advocated the Persianization of his native Azarbaijan, and demonstrated against the Anglo-Iranian Agreement of 1919. In 1922, Arānī won a state scholarship to study chemistry at Berlin University. The stay in Germany produced a major shift in Arānī's thought. His early works from Europe pursue his interest in nationalism in pamphlets on 'Omar Kayyām, Sa'dī, and Nāṣer-e Kōsrow, as well as in regular contributions to the secular-patriotic journals *Īrānšahr* (Land of Iran) and *Farangestān* (Europe). His later articles, however, starting after 1925, show a greater concern with socialism and Marxism: these works include a Marxist study entitled *Selsela-ye oṣūl-e 'olūm-e daqīqa* (Principles of the exact sciences series), and anonymous contributions to the exiled Communist Party newspaper *Peykār* (Combat).



Having received his doctorate in natural sciences, Arānī returned to Tehran in 1930 and took a teaching position at the College of Technology. With a circle of left-wing intellectuals, many of whom had also studied in western Europe, he formed secret discussion groups and three years later founded a journal *Donyā* (the World), the first theoretical Marxist periodical in Iran. Although Marxist, *Donyā* used an academic style and convoluted language to thwart the censors. Its articles included Arānī's "Dialectical Materialism," "Mysticism and the Elements of Matter," "The Materialist Concept of Humanity," and "The Materialistic Bases of Life and the Ideology" (all re-published in *T. Arānī, Ātār wa maqālāt*, Cologne, 1977).

The publication of *Donyā* was cut short in 1937 when the government, shaken by a university strike, arrested Arānī and his colleagues. In November, 1938, Arānī and forty-eight of his associates, later the "Fifty-three," were brought to trial for violating the law against the propaganda of collectivism, socialism, and communism. Most were pronounced guilty and sentenced to imprisonment, and as leader of the "Fifty-three," Arānī himself was given the maximum sentence possible under the law: ten years solitary confinement. Sixteen months after the trial, Arānī died in prison at the early age of thirty-eight. The police claimed that he had succumbed to a fatal attack of typhus. His fellow prisoners, however, charged that he, like many other leading opponents of the regime, had been murdered. Whatever the real reason for his death many saw Arānī as a martyr. Upon their release from prison during World War II, his colleagues founded the Tudeh Party and took Arānī as their "spiritual leader."

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(E. Abrahamian)

ii. Political Thoughts and Activities

Taqī Arānī went to Germany in 1922 and was admitted in 1922 to the chemistry department of the University of Berlin, where he also attended classes in mathematics, physics, and philosophy. To pay for his keep he took a job with the Kāvīānī Press of Berlin and often stayed at work until midnight. During this time he wrote a highly technical essay on 'Omar Kāyyām's *Šarḥmā aškala men mošāderāt Oqlīdos* (Explanation of difficulties in the postulates of Euclid), and got it printed with the help of the German orientalist Friedrich Rosen. Arānī completed his chemistry thesis and successfully defended it on 19 December 1927; its title is *Die reduzierenden Wirkungen der unterphosphorischen Säure auf organische Verbindung* (The reducing effects of subphosphoric acid on organic compound formation), Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1928. For this, the Doctorate of Natural Sciences was awarded to Arānī.

At about the same time Arānī commenced his political activity in European student circles. Earlier, both in Iran and in Germany, he had cherished a patriotism verging on chauvinism. Like many other freedom-seekers, he had believed that the nation, in order to surmount its backwardness and acquire modern science and civilization, should purge foreign words from the Persian language, turn to pre-Islamic Iranian religion, and establish a centralized state on Sasanian lines. These notions are reflected in articles by Arānī in Persian journals published in Europe at the time, such as *Farangestān* and *Īrānšahr*. He had believed it to be particularly vital that all patriots should zealously encourage people to speak Persian instead of Turkish, because Azarbaijan was the homeland of Zoroaster and the Aryans. He lived for many years, however,



in Germany under the Weimar republic, where the Social Democrats had taken control after the defeat in the First World War and the deposition of the Kaiser but had shown weaknesses in adopting efficient ways to run the country—weaknesses which led ultimately to the establishment of Hitler's Third Reich. Arānī's observation of the turbulent German events nurtured and rooted his sympathy for socialism. In his younger student days he had supposed that socialist theories, which were new to him, would reinforce his own nationalist sentiments. Study of the writings of Marx, Engels, Hegel, and Lenin gave him some knowledge of Marxism and prompted him to further inquiry, while cooperation with like-minded persons in Europe convinced him of the possibility of political success through collective action.

With this intent, Arānī returned to Iran in 1309 Š./1930. He was confident that reform of the governmental system and establishment of a democratic regime could be achieved through united effort by the politically conscious youth and would make it possible to solve Iran's problems by such measures as the nationalization of the oil industry, unveiling of the women, reinforcement of the economy, and the raising of the standard of living and the level of education. After doing military service in the Army Ordinance, he chose to teach physics in high schools so that he might have contact with young people. His special field was the interconnection between physics and chemistry.

In 1310 Š./1931 the enactment of a law against political parties or associations aiming at overthrowing the government by force helped to consolidate Reżā Shah's régime. The Communist Party was declared illegal, and on the pretext of combating communism, restraints on expression of any kind of libertarian or revolutionary thought were intensified. Despite this, Arānī persisted in his opposition. In talks to young people, both at school and in private, he discussed questions of interest to them such as the role of women in society, the need for free elections and full right of participation in the country's political life, and the importance of abolishing prostitution and eradicating foreign influence. In the course of his talks, he acquainted the listeners with dialectical methods and urged them to learn about socialism. As a result of these debates, a number of high school students were drawn into political and organizational work, and with Dr. Arānī's guidance separate small groups of a few members each were brought into being.

After living in Tehran for little more than two years, Dr. Arānī succeeded in launching a magazine, *Donyā* (the World), with the help of a couple of friends and sympathizers. He brought out the first issue in 1311 Š./1933. This was a



bold step in view of the severity of the censorship at that time. *Donyā* was planned to be a magazine of varied content, and Marxist theories were presented in the course of articles on science.

Dr. Arānī was a believer in the ideology of materialism, which he described as “the culminating point in the development of human thinking up to the present.” He expounded his theories in several articles which were published in *Donyā*, notably “Erfān wa oṣūl-e māddī” (Mysticism and materialistic principles) and “Bašar az naẓar-e māddī” (Mankind from the materialistic viewpoint), and in the *Selsela-ye oṣūl-e ‘olūm-e daqīqa* (Principles of the exact sciences series). His reasoning was based on the principle that thought is only possible through the medium of the brain, that the brain is a material substance, and that the power to think is a property of this substance. The brain is subject, like other material substances, to laws of change and development under the impact of external factors; it reacts to influences from outside and reflects in the mind things which exist in reality. Thus the brain is subject to external realities. Together with natural factors, another factor is at work, namely society, the frame within which all human relations are set. The basis of these relations is labor, which enables individuals to survive, and therefore human beings exert influence on one another. The human race, in its struggle for survival, discerns a chain of laws of cause and effect and by their virtue discovers general rules. In this way science (*‘elm*), in the proper sense of the word, is created. Truth may be defined as the correspondence of science with fact, but every truth which mankind discovers is gradually perfected as science advances and as more accurate and abundant evidence of the relations between particular things and the rest of nature comes to light. For finding truth, i.e. for acquiring knowledge, experimentation is necessary; “experimentation and application are mankind’s tools for analyzing nature.” Acquiring knowledge of single things and thereby of the whole of nature is an ongoing process in which relative advances are made by stages. At each stage a certain number of relations is known, and this is the true part of the then existent degree of understanding. Dr. Arānī considered Newton’s law of gravity to have been true up to the time of Einstein’s formulation of the theory of relativity, because Newton’s law, though inaccurate, was confirmed experimentally and practically in certain situations; its defects were rectified by Einstein’s theory, and we have thus moved nearer to the truth. Similar progress has been made in our understanding of the atom, which we once held to be indivisible but now confidently believe to be made up of protons, electrons, and neutrons. All our more or less accurate conceptions of reality



consist of relative truths. Thus there are no eternal truths. Every truth undergoes change and development concurrently with the progress of science and society in particular times and places.

On the basis of these theories, and through the medium of the magazine *Donyā*, Dr. Arānī and his like-minded colleagues examined problems which were the common talk of Iranian intellectuals—or at least of a minority among them—in the inter-war period, problems such as fascism, racism, religious fanaticism, and the nature of contemporary art and literature. In his article “Mysticism and materialistic principles,” Arānī begins by outlining the history of philosophy and science in Greece, India, and Iran, and goes on to assess the philosophical system of Henri Bergson, which then enjoyed a considerable vogue in France and in certain circles in Iran. He refutes Bergson’s theory that the soul is an independent entity capable of evolving toward perfection by degrees, and that God is at the top of these degrees of perfection. He does not accept that the *élan vital* is the cause of progress and that all human advances are attributable to a limited number of individuals in whom this *élan* is more fully potent. In flat denial of Bergson’s notion that the progress of civilization has been due to intuition, Arānī maintained that in periods when mystic intuition prevailed, science and consequently human progress stagnated.

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