

Dr. Ali Shariati on Islamic Thought
(An analytical Study)



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Abstract

Dr. Ali Sharīatī emerged on the intellectual horizons of Iran in 1970's, and his ideas proved forerunner for the Islamic revolution. He believed that modernization would be reliable with traditional Islamic belief that's why he was most popular among young revolutionaries of Iran.

Sharīatī's fame in Iran is that of a promoter and advocate of Revolution, a political activist, and a Sociologist. With his powerful pen and eloquent mode of expression he was able to provide the most complex scientific and sociological issues. His ideas have still strong resonance within Iranian society.

This paper seeks to explore his biography and also underlines the major works through which he tried to regenerate the Muslim society. The paper probes into analysis of the intellectual contribution of Ali Sharīatī to Muslim thought by exploring his Islamic, sociological and political ideas and evaluation of his thought by other contemporary scholars.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated

to

My mother and father

In grateful appreciation of their sacrifices for our family,

For their endless love and devotion to us and Almighty Allah,

&

For their patient guidance and modelled values

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Description	Pg no.
Introduction.....	1-12
 Chapter 1	
Dr. Ali Shariati- A Biography.....	13-31
• From Child to Adult.....	14
• Ali’s Primary School.....	15
• Secondary School.....	17
• University Years.....	19
• Return to Iran.....	25
• Imprisonment.....	26
• Freedom.....	28
• Migration and Death.....	30
 Chapter 2	
Major Works of Dr. Ali Sharīatī.....	32-53
• Books.....	34
• Articles.....	45
• Lectures.....	47

Chapter 3

Intellectual Contribution of Sharīatī to Muslim Thought.....54-89

Section A

- Religious Thought.....55
- Sociological Thought.....66
- Political Thought.....72

Section B

- Scholars Overview of Sharīatī's Thought.....77-89

Conclusion.....90-92

Bibliography.....93-99

Index.....100-103

Introduction

Background

Iranian Revolution (1979) was a direct fusion of a social movement and an intellectual trend - a revival of Islamism infused with Western Marxism and Third World.¹

Intellectuals are very important figures for societies in crises. Intellectuals living in nations in crisis must take on the role of the soldiers of the pen, the rhetoricians, and essentially, the spokesmen of the people.

Edward Said defined an intellectual as the following:

“The intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations”.²

In particular, Iranian intellectuals have been at the forefront of change within their country. Iran’s contemporary intellectuals have shown this passion for change by questioning their country’s past and present, and putting forward new hopes for Iran’s future.³

Iran was reunified in the 19th century, and ruled until 1925 by the Qajar dynasty whose period of dominance was largely based on their support from two major European powers: Great Britain

¹ Farhad Kosrokhavar, “The New Intellectuals in Iran,” *Social Compass*, 51, no. 1 (2004): 191.

² Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lecture* (New York: Pantheon Books 1994), 11.

³ Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse University Press, 1996), 21.

and Russia.⁴ The power of these two major Western bodies introduced Iranians to the political ways of “The West”, an entity that might break treaties less than a year after signing them that might switch allies when convenient, and overall, act in ways that seemed irrational and unjust.⁵ More importantly, the Qajar dynasty introduced what Nikki Keddie calls “Shadow politics”, a time when “real politics, often occurring not only, as in many countries, behind the scenes, but even beyond the seas.”⁶ She notes the supreme economic and political destruction brought about by the West in this period included:

“The undermining of most Iranian handicrafts, the transformation of carpet weavers into labourers working for a pittance, the fall in prices of Iranian exports as compared to European imports, and a disastrous drop in the international price of silver, the basis of Iran’s currency.”⁷

Reza Shah seized power in the 1920s and began what would later become known as the Pahlavi dynasty. Nikki Keddie notes that “as compared to the Qajars, Reza Shah acted with significant independence of foreign powers.”⁸

World War II, on the other hand, had devastating effects on the Iranian economy. In 1941 Reza Shah was forcibly removed by the British and replaced by his son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. Both during and after the war, Reza Shah’s modernization projects and economic reforms were abandoned. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) remained completely free from Iranian governmental controls and monitoring. The frustration of Iranians grew as they were forced to pay high prices for Iranian oil, while the numbers of skilled Iranian workers dwindled.⁹

⁴ Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press 2006), 38.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press 2006), 119.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

The Shah's regime became increasingly oppressive, brutal, corrupt, and extravagant. It also suffered from basic functional failures that brought economic bottlenecks, shortages and inflation. At the same time, support for the Shah may have waned among Western politicians and media especially under the administration of U.S. President Jimmy Carter as a result of the Shah's support for OPEC petroleum price increases earlier in the decade.

It is within the social, political and economic climate of the reign of the dictatorial and Western-allied Muhammad Reza Shah that the revolutionary discourse within Iran began to take shape.

'Alī Sharīatī, who died in London in June 1977, was among those who were predecessors of Islamic Revolution in Iran.

His major aim was to make the Iranian Muslims aware of this fact that if they wanted themselves to be free from the foreign control, then they have to follow their own Islamic heritage rather than adopting the Western ideas.

Literature Review

Islamic Iran in its present form would have been a distant dream without the scholarly, revolutionary and progressive contributions of Alī Sharīatī in 1960s and early 1970s¹⁰.

¹⁰ Ishtiaque Ahmad, "Political Philosophy of Iran", *Journal of Peace Studies* 12, no 1, (2005): 1.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

Many scholars and analysts are prone to disintegrate his thought by looking into it through one aspect or in a sense analyses it from some predominant notion in their minds. Hence their critical studies usually present one or two angles of this volatile thinker of Iran.

Hamid Algar was the first one to introduce Sharīatī to Western readers. In introducing Sharīatī, Algar's tone is sympathetic, yet scholarly and objective. When he analyzes Sharīatī's book "On the Sociology of Islam" he identifies that this title could raise questions about the notion of Islamic sociology and Sharīatī's qualifications for formulating such sociology.

Sharīatī articulated a brand of Islamic discourse that was most appealing to the educated middle class of Iran. It appealed particularly to the Iranian youth, to under privileged university students, to those from the traditional middle classes, and to educated young women from traditional backgrounds.¹¹ Algar claims that he is presenting Sharīatī's work as a stimulus to think among Muslims.

Yann Richard is another analyst who is much closer to Hamid Algar in his treatment of Sharīatī's works and thoughts. His approach remained sympathetic and his attitude defensive when he discusses Sharīatī.

Ultimately, Alī Sharīatī is widely recognized as the thinker who set into motion the wheels of revolution. He was certainly a man who spent much of his life in protest and behind bars, an individual who contributed much towards a new vision of Iran and who lived under the motto: "Life is conviction and struggle and nothing more."¹²

¹¹ Ali, Mirsepassi, "Religious intellectuals and Western critiques of secular modernity", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 3, no. 26 (2006): 424.

¹² Ali Sharīatī, *On the Sociology of Islam* (Introduction), Trans. Hamid Algar, (New Delhi, 1991), 27.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

Rahnema in his book “An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Alī Sharīatī” mainly exposes divergences and a meandering in Sharīatī’s thinking. He presented the facts as he could of Sharīatī’s dispensation to SAVAK and his role as one of the flames of the Revolution. But through all this we see a man who was often frustrating to his supporters and critics and yet true to him, even as his ideas may have evolved.

Sharīatī was a man of his times. He reflected the mood, conditions, problems, pains and conceivable solutions of his times. He does not fit into any classical stereotype. Those who tried to portray him as such, simply deform the man. Whatever he wrote, whatever he said and whatever he did which excited and roused him was filled with riddles and puzzles. Such was his life. A true product of the fertile cultural soil of Khorasan, the land of epics and mystics, ‘Alī Sharīatī was at ease with words, the principal tool of his forefathers.

Laleh Bakhtiar is a prominent writer on Sharīatī. She has translated many works of Sharīatī in English. She has also contributed to book “Sharīatī on Sharīatī and Muslim Woman” as a co-writer with Sharīatī.

This book “Sharīatī on Sharīatī and Muslim Woman” is divided into two primary sections; the first is a kind of autobiography, and the second is on women in Islam. The book ends with a variety of indices concerning Sharīatī’s work, including a full reference to his collected writings. Sharīatī defines the ‘woman question’ and the dilemmas that contemporary Muslim women face.¹³

¹³ Laleh Bakhtiar, and Ali Sharīatī, *Sharīatī on Sharīatī and the Muslim Woman* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1996), 114.

Sharīfātī neither elaborates on women's position in Sharī'ah, nor does he engage with proponents of Sharī'ah discourses on women. Instead, he uses the occasion to elaborate his own interpretation of Shī'ah history, to condemn those in power for distorting it, to denounce Iranian society as one of pseudo- Muslims whose ways have little resemblance to true Islam, and to blame clergy and intellectuals alike for not enlightening people about true Islam. Although he criticizes narrow interpretations of the Sharī'ah, he remains imprecise and evasive himself.

“This is why the veiled woman who wants to give birth to her children, screams, Why men physicians? Why should women not be treated by women physicians? She wants to have her child to go school and to the university. Her cries increase - is this the faculty of literature or a fashion show? Is this an Islamic university? Is this an Islamic society? Does this school smell just a bit of Islam? Does it contain a bit of ethics and meaning? Is this the radio of a religious country or just a noise box?”¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid., 114.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

Kingshuk Chatterjee is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Calcutta University. He has written a book “Alī Sharīatī and the Shaping of Political Islam in Iran” in which he tell the story of how Sharīatī developed a language of political Islam, speaking in an idiom intelligible to the Iranian public, and subverting the Shah's regime and its claim to legitimacy.

“While Ayatollah Khomeini is considered the face of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, ‘Alī Sharīatī is considered a much greater influence on shaping the revolutionary consciousness than Khomeini’”.¹⁵

Abrahamian's commentary on ‘Alī Sharīatī and his relationship to the Mojahedin is a unique and impressive achievement. “Radical Islam” is a learned, lucid and cogent piece of Iranian history.

This study is carefully planned to present the facts, the detailed description of life events and philosophies of Sharīatī, his work his thoughts and also the works and thoughts upon him and about him.

¹⁵ Chatterjee kingshuk, *Ali Sharīatī and the Shaping of Political Islam in Iran*(USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

The Objective

This paper will discuss Iranian intellectual Alī Sharīatī, one of the great thinkers of the pre-Revolutionary era of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the man who properly introduced the notion of “political spirituality” or revolutionary Islam.

Alī Sharīatī was an intellectual with an acute sense of social responsibility. He devoted all his time to the propagation of religion, and transmission of Islamic ideas to the young generation.¹⁶ He waged a constant struggle against what he called the evil temper of the modern age and society, the withered root of which could be watered only by the renunciation of all things, by martyrdom, according to him.¹⁷

Sharīatī’s historical significance should not be forgotten as many of his ideas are still workable today. He was an Intellectual whose ideas were ultimately directed to a resurgence and revival of Islam and Muslim society. Some of his ideas were innovative but many were inspired by the ideas of other Muslim thinkers, who were Sunni, such as the poet-philosopher of Indian Sub-continent Allama Muhammad Iqbal, whose works are eminent and popular in Iran. Many of Sharīatī’s ideas were taken from the ideas and philosophy of Western thinkers.

Sharīatī’s background in a traditional Islamic environment and his recurrent references to Islam in his writings are enough to prove him as a scholar, like so many of his contemporaries, concerned to address the miserable plight of Muslim societies, and also to seek solutions in Islam. Sharīatī propagated his ideas during the days when the Islamic revolution in Iran was in

¹⁶Sharīatī, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 27.

¹⁷Ishtiaque Ahmed, “Political Philosophy of Iran: Role of Ali Sharīatī,” 1.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

process of being shaped up.¹⁸ Sharīatī's contribution to shape the ideologies concerning revolution will be remembered long not only because of their novelty but also because they precede the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Many people believe that Sharīatī's ideas and thoughts influenced those intellectuals and young Iranians who played an active role in the movement of Revolution and hence, Sharīatī's role is a significant one in producing the idea of Islam as a dynamic force among a generation and a class of young Iranians who would otherwise have become even more alienated from Islam.

His understanding of Islam truly developed with time. Regarding that, he discusses two elements; firstly, understanding of Islam related to the needs of the modern world; and secondly, explanation of reasons why real Islam is so diverse from the concepts of traditional Ulema.

Being a modern intellectual, Sharīatī devoted himself to social justice and passion to use an efficient way to reach its destination. He believed that Shī'ah Islam is the best tool for him. He was a religious person who believed Islam as the best religion in the world.

No doubt, 'Alī Sharīatī was one of those remarkable personalities who privileged the Islamic revolution in Iran. It was his misfortune that he did not live long to see this revolution.

This work mainly focuses to evaluate Sharīatī, his personality and his works in a broad spectrum.

This work is an endeavour to present Sharīatī as a whole.

Now after 35 years of his death, his contributions and legacy towards this great revolution have been forgotten to a great extent.

¹⁸ kingshuk, *Ali Sharīatī and the Shaping of Political Islam in Iran*,13.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

He did not live to see the results of his works and efforts that had been realized to some extent in the Iranian revolution of 1979. His friends and followers had also been deprived of the chance to know him better. There was possibility of his becoming the president of Iran and giving history a different course, only if he had lived longer.¹⁹ He was such an ardent advocate of a social revolution that he earned a repute of a freedom fighter.

Thesis Structure

This research project will seek to explore and investigate biography, works and major Islamic, Social and Political Thought of ‘Alī Sharīatī.

The first chapter of this work is an endeavour to sum up the momentous life of Dr. ‘Alī Sharīatī. From his early childhood to the youth, the traces of a strong belief were eminent. He adopted the profession of teaching and by the time flourished himself as an ardent advocate of his thoughts and ideologies. SAVAK gave him a tough time mainly because of his influential speeches to the university students. He suffered confinements and restrictions and was mentally so tortured that he left Iran and died of heart attack in 1977.

The second chapter of this research introduces Sharīatī’s works with a commentary. His major works include books, articles as well as lectures. Although all these works reflect a wide range of subjects yet all are deeply rooted in the religion and its philosophies.

Hence the third chapter is a careful exploration of Sharīatī’s thoughts and philosophies. This chapter gives a detailed study of ‘Alī Sharīatī’s doctrines; their origins in the faith and the

¹⁹ Ershaghi, Lawrence. “The Forgotten Revolutionary,” New York Times, February 24, 2003, <http://iranian.com/Opinion/2003/February/Sharīatī/index.htm> (accessed May 23, 2012).

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

metamorphosis of these theories as a result of an intellectual process along with a short overview of his thought by the contemporary scholars.

While concluding the research work I tried to illuminate some hidden capabilities of Sharīatī's thoughts as well.

Chapter 1

Dr. Alī Sharīatī- A Biography

From Child to Adult

Alī Sharīatī was born in 1933 in an Iranian village called Mazinan. The village is about 70 kilometer from Sabzavar on the edge of the Kavir²⁰ desert. He was the first male child of

²⁰Kavir also known as Kavir-e Namak or Great Salt Desert is a large desert lying in the middle of the Iranian Plateau.

Dr. Ali Sharīfātī on Islamic Thought

Muhammad Taqi and Zahra after their three daughters Tahereh, Tayba and Batul. It was an urban lower middle class family.²¹

Sharīfātī's mother Zahra was a dedicated and hard working woman from a family of small land owners. She was such a religious and practicing Muslim that one of Sharīfātī's childhood friends, who visited Alī's home off and on, says that he never saw her face even once. Like most conventional devoted Muslims, she always believed in destiny and cuddled her position in life with patience and gratefulness. Alī's own account of his mother is highly respectful. With a certain pride, he confirmed that "his good nature was inherited to him from her".²²

His father Muhammad Taqi himself taught him the technique of systematic and rational perception and filled him with a moral and political fortitude. Alī had an immense deal of admiration for his father because of his knowledge and social status.

"My father fashioned the first dimension of my spirit. It was he who first taught me the art of thinking and the art of being human. He gave me a taste for freedom, nobility, purity, steadfastness, faith and independence of heart. It was he who introduced me with his friends and his books. They were my constant and familiar companions from the earliest years of my schooling. I grew up and matured in his library, which was for him the whole of his life and his family."²³

Alī was born in a self-effacing family. He nurtured the thought that virtue and moral decorum are honourable that imparts societal admiration and position not money. Sharīfātī's family always felt

²¹ Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Sharīfātī* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 3-4.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hamid Algar. "Introduction: A Bibliographical Sketch", *On Sociology of Islam: Lectures*. (Berkeley: Mizan Press 1979), 23.

proud on its humble living, they never felt disgraced. Because of family's modest earning it was Zahra who happily established all kinds of individual sacrifice.²⁴

Alī's Primary School

After the united incursion of Iran in the autumn of 1941, Alī entered in the first grade at school. 'Alī remembered that after the incursion his father left them in village and went to Mashhad to know the current events. Sharīfātī spent summer in village of Mazinan in 1941. There were the hard times for them; even necessities were fulfilled with difficulty. Alī was very young at that time but he eye witnessed the activities of Soviet troops in Mashhad.

Alī's primary and high school fellows have mentioned his relative scarcity. One of his class fellows mentions the day when Alī was in torn clothes at primary school. Another of his high school acquaintances remembered him sharing the dress with his father. He also recalled that whenever all friends stopped at market to buy something then 'Alī was the only one who was commonly impoverished.²⁵

Muhammad Taqi was the administrator of studies- a job with both edifying and disciplining function at an esteemed private school called *Ibn-e-yamin*. Perhaps because 'Alī went to the school *Ibn-e-yamin* may be because his father Muhammad Taqi was doing job there. Many Jews and Christian students were studying at *Ibn-e-yamin* at that time. 'Alī was not very friendly at

²⁴ Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 31.

²⁵ Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 35.

primary level in school. He was silent and timorous; he always felt lonely and had many self-imposed activities with his fellows.²⁶

According to his class fellows, he never mixed very much with other children. Even he did not play football that was the traditional group – game of boys of his age.

In his own reminiscence of childhood, Sharīatī remained detached and isolated and had different qualities in him. He was so isolated that among visitors and parents he kept on thinking or sometimes smiles or speaks with himself.

‘Alī was teased by his associates and relatives for day dreaming but ‘Alī remained calm and silent. He was not interested in studies and used to skip classes but he was fond of reading. He used to stay awake late at night and early in the morning for reading. Living in his own insulation, he was evident to the world around him.

He was so much indulged in reading that he had read 200 books during first year at primary and it made him authoritative in primary classes. Even one of his teachers referred him as a student who knew more than the teachers. He engrossed himself in books which turned out to be his preeminent friend. Because of self-education in every class he was 100 lessons ahead of the rest of the class and 99 lessons ahead of most of his teachers.²⁷

Alī recalled that “Saburi Jannati his Persian teacher in the sixth grade referred to him as a student who is more educated than all his teachers and lazier than all his classmates”²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 36.

²⁸ Ibid.

Most of his friends at primary remembered him as aloof and reticent boy at primary but at high school he was quite opposite in nature. They felt that with the passage of time Alī would steadily gain his self-reliance.

Secondary School

In September 1947 at Ibn-e- yamin ‘Alī completed his primary school and took admission in Ferdowsi High School that was one of the best high schools for boys at Mashhad. ‘Alī was famous among his friends as friendly person and they always felt pleasure with him. He was famous as a quiet, swift tongued sensible gentleman whose discerning epigram would shatter the silence; disturb order in class but sometimes his wit turned his class fellows in gigs and laughter along the teachers.

Alī finished his secondary education at Ferdowsi and decided to choose another direction in his studies. He sat for the scrupulous Teachers Training college entrance exam in 1950 on behalf of his father. A close childhood friend of ‘Alī depicted that his father was a teacher that’s why he wanted his son to follow his occupation. His father Muhammad Taqi was teaching Arabic and religious studies at the Teachers Training College and it played a great role in Alī’s shift. “‘Alī’s own account however, cites the family’s poverty as the main reason”.²⁹

The college had a boarding section for males only and after admission all his expenses were paid by the government. ‘Alī participated in political activities during this period and soon he became dominant in the college.

²⁹Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 47.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

Since the assorted political commiseration of the students revealed those of Iranian people at that time, it was predictable that civic political debates and apprehension would also be replicate. Few pro-Tudeh teachers supported pro-Tudeh students, most of them were the teachers of mathematics. So called Nationalist Mosadidist continuously fought with the adherent of Tudeh.

In class the pro-Tudeh teachers tried to promulgate their ideological position and would confronted their anti- Mosadid and anti-sacred discussion³⁰.

Alī graduated in 1952 and was employed by the Ministry of Education and was sent to the Ketabpur Primary school at Ahmadabad where he taught all subjects to elementary classes.

After graduation from the Teachers Training College, Alī got his teaching diploma, but not high school diploma. In June 1954 he passed the inclusive exams, both written and oral in literature for high school certificate and thrived with an average grade. Alī was very popular among his friends from his secondary school to university.

University Years

The Faculty of Literature was properly induced at Mashhad on 15 September 1955 but did not hold classes until later. On 15 August 1956, Mashhad University started working officially. In 1959 after four years of inauguration of Mashhad University Muhammad Taqi started to teach Tafsir of Qurān at the Faculty of Religious Studies where the classes were most likely all male.

Alī Sharīatī was the constituent of first arriving class, composed of some twenty four students; one of them was a priest. At the time the university only offered a single degree in Persian

³⁰Ibid., 50.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

literature. All students were supposed to take admission in the History of Literature. ‘Alī Sharīatī remained primary school teacher for three years and at that time he was 22 years old.³¹

He was vigorously involved in politics, and became a famous intellectual, a passionate Mosadaquist and also became famous for his literary work of translation of Kashif-al- Ghita and Abū Zarr. The daily Khorasan had instigated him as an aspiring thinker and star at provincial level.

His articles lifted up his visible personality particularly as a social detractor, theoretician and a sentimental romantic poet. Even though ‘Alī was registered at the university as a full time student, he sustained his job as a primary teacher at KetabPur.

The university management threatened that the part time students and specially teachers would be expelled if they continued their absence and this may lead to disqualification from taking their exams.

In spite of all the permissible and practical problems Sharīatī thrived in both holding occupation and completed his university education.

His orbit of life changed at three places from 1957 to 1959. An agreement between National Iranian Oil Company and Agip was endorsed on July 3,1957.As its reaction the National Resistance movement (NRM) issued a 24 pages pamphlet named Oil which underlined the rising political and financial reliance of Iran on Western countries. They also argued that such circumstances of suppression had been the penalty of Iran contracting with the western oil

³¹ Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 50-53.

companies after the collapse of Mossadiq.³² The circulation of this pamphlet frenzied the authorities and security forces and they started a substantial crackdown against NRM members.

The authorities arrested the group of Mashhad students on 16 September. In this clean up Sharīatī was also arrested. Muhammad Taqi Sharīatī and Muhammad Qasim Qazi were among the arrested ones. This clean up gave rise to a rebellion not only in Mashhad but also in Tehran.

After sometimes, ‘Alī along with his father was released on 10th October 1957. The incident of arrest and confinement had a major influence on Sharīatī but soon he went back to his normal life and his study.

The second significant incident in Sharīatī’s life during this period was that of his marriage to Bibi Fatimah, known as Puran³³. She was a lady with strong character which attracted Alī Sharīatī. They two were married on July 15, 1958. The dissimilarity between Puran’s liberal family and Alī’s conservative family was significant. Although she belonged to modern family but she fully co-operated with Alī.

Alī’s marriage remained a hot issue in Mashhad because he had married an unveiled woman.³⁴ Whispers about Muhammad Taqi’s son having married an unveiled class fellow remained extended enough to discourage ‘Alī, who grieved the intransigent approach of his fellow citizens.

³²**Musaddiq** was the Prime Minister of Iran from 1951 until being overthrown in 1953. He was removed from power in a coup on 19 August 1953, organized and carried out by the United States CIA at the request of the British MI6 which chose Iranian General Fazlollah Zahedi to succeed Mosaddiq.

³³ Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 80.

³⁴ Ibid.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

The third major event of his life which completely changed Sharīatī's life was receiving scholarship to study in France³⁵. He wanted to go out of Iran and in the form of study scholarship his desire was going to be fulfilled. At last, he left for France in late May 1959 leaving behind six months pregnant wife.

He was a man who had spent most of his life in provincial Khorasan³⁶, and the Paris of late 1950 and early 1960 was significantly astonishing for him. So he was not willing to change himself according to Western civilization just like the other students of developing countries. His brought up was completely according to parameters set by the religion, an enthusiasm of a dreamy poetic tendency.

In Paris Sharīatī's educational interest was based on two very different kinds of reasoning. Back in 1955, during his first year at the Faculty of Literature in Mashhad, he had to Jalal-ud-din Farsi that he did not wish to end up as a school teacher like his father. He intended to teach at university and it was obligatory to obtain a doctorate for this purpose.

Sharīatī's path to his doctorate was clear. Evidently the doctorate required a more rigorous and voluminous dissertation and was more difficult to obtain. At that time, the government of Iran allowed students to choose any type of doctorate they wished for and gave both the same standing in Iran.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶Khorasan is a historic region majority of which lies in modern day northeastern Iran, parts of Afghanistan and parts of the modern Central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It was historically a Persian province.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

After his return from Iran in summer 1960, Sharīatī went to register his doctorate and looked for a research director in the field of Persian literature and language. He approached professor Lazard whom he asked to suggest a project which would culminate in a doctorate.

Lazard knew of a text in Persian called *Fazayel-e- Balkh* or ‘the merits of Balkh’ written by *Safi al- Din Balkhi*. He proposed that Sharīatī should correct, comment on and translate the text into French. This type of project was normal for a doctoral dissertation and remains so to this day. Sharīatī set himself to work.

In June 1963, nearly a year before he went to Iran, and just before his disputes at Iran-e- Azad, Sharīatī allocated 115 written pages of the translated text, including bibliography and notes and 113 pages of correct Persian text.³⁷ The translation was preceded by a 9 page introduction in which Sharīatī argued that text shed light on the material and cultural life of *Balkh* through the biography of the scholars in the text. The quality of the thesis was not excellent but in those days standards were different.

His thesis was not a good one according to today’s standards but at that time the parameters were different, so a jury of scholars finally accepted his theses with a lowest possible grades on 21st June 1963. In those days the doctorate diplomas were not particularly rubric so no title was given to his diploma and it was not registered by the title. However under the bold title of Doctorate ‘*de L’University de Paris*’ Sharīatī’s entire thesis was covering the topic ‘historic *de L’Islam* medieval. So It could be said that Sharīatī’s main field of study was the ‘History of Medieval Islam’³⁸.

³⁷Sharīatī, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 25.

³⁸ Ibid.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

In March 1964, before Sharīatī's family headed back home, the Iranian embassy certified Sharīatī's doctorate and considered it as equivalent to a university doctorate in literature, not Persian literature.

He also spent five years at the University of Paris where he was not only allowed to continue his studies, but also to take advantage of books which were not available in Iran. During his stay in Paris (Algar, 1991), he had a great interaction with most of the well educated people, scholars and writers such as 'Bergson', 'Albert Camus', 'Sartre', 'Schwartz' and also the works of philosophers and sociologists such as 'Gurwitsch' and 'Berque', and Islamologists such as 'Louis Massignon'. Sharīatī had a great interest in Islamic studies and Sociology so he studied these subjects with great concern.³⁹

The analytical school of French sociology had a great effect on him but he had a compound vision of thoughts and action. He was of the view that both approaches to society were not credible i.e. the positive approach which regards sociology as an absolute science, the other purely Marxist approach⁴⁰. These approaches were not able to understand or scrutinize the realities of non- industrialized world, which was known as the "Third world".

Sharīatī was persistently busy to search a sociology that would be able to analyze and explain the realities of life of those people whose subject to imperialism had been proved by European communists but still they were struggling to achieve their self-esteem and freedom.

³⁹ Sharīatī, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 25.

⁴⁰ Ali Sharīatī, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*. Tr. R. Campbel (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1980).

During his stay in France, Sharīatī coincided with the turbulent time of the Algerian revolt, when different parties of Europe including the scholars and sociologists, were accepting the position, constructive and harmful, on the fortune of the Muslim people who had been subjected to imperialism for more than a century and were busy in a ferocious Jihad, “a life – and - death struggle”, carrying their fight into the France itself. The position of the French Communist Party and the Algerian Communist Party both of which supported the continued capture of Algeria by France and opposed the Algerian revolt was really edifying. Sharīatī showed great interest and consideration to what was happening in Algeria, for he never considered himself detached from the anti - imperialism.⁴¹

Return to Iran

On Sharīatī’s death a semiofficial newspaper of Iran published an article by kayhan which said

“In 1964, when Sharīatī deemed himself to be better equipped than ever before for the service of his country, his people and the perspicuous religion of Islam, he set out of Iran, with his wife and two children he was bearing with him a valuable gift for Iranian society. He had discovered a whole new approach to religion and it was his firm intention to wage a determined battle with a weapon of logic and within the framework of true Islam against the superstition and hypocrisy that were harmful to nation and religion alike. Upon returning to Iran he was appointed as lecturer at the University of Mashhad”⁴²

As it is stated in this article, Sharīatī discovered the new approach to Religion. He was a man of logic. So, it would have been completely suitable for him to be working at a university. But this did not happen actually. As soon as he arrived at Bazarg⁴³, he was arrested in the presence of his wife and children and was sent to prison and was not allowed to see his father even after

⁴¹Sharīatī, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 26.

⁴²Ibid., 36.

⁴³The main Iranian border.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

being released from prison. He was made to work for many years as a teacher at different high schools and the college of agriculture at the same level he used to teach before going abroad.⁴⁴

Throughout his lifespan, his homeland proved to be a prison for him where isolation, suffering and all kinds of anxiety bore down on him, but at the same time this made him more resolute to carry on his effort. After many years, he was appointed at the University of Mashhad, where he devoted himself whole-heartedly to the undeviating guidance of young generation. His students were proud of him and felt pride in calling themselves his students.

Imprisonment

Sharīatī went to SAVAK⁴⁵ command center to meet with Sabeti on 28 September 1973. He was ordered to present himself on the following day at 10 in the morning to Reza Attarpur, Sabeti's deputy, a key operator and interrogator. On his advent the questioning began. Detainees at Komiteh were usually first cross-examined verbally and then structured to inscribe a complete history of their political actions, directorial tie and acquaintances.

He was informed that establishment was definite of his distinctiveness and that he had been detained for seditious activities and intrigues in opposition to state sanctuary.

Based on critically interfered sheets of Sharīatī's available interrogation at SAVAK, it can be deduced that he was inquired four times at least. On September 29, a month and twenty days after the first, the fourth grilling was demeanor.

⁴⁴ Sharīatī, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 30-33.

⁴⁵ Organization of Intelligence and National Security was the secret police, domestic security and intelligence service established by Iran's Mohammad Reza Shah with the help of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (the CIA). SAVAK operated from 1957 to 1979, when the Pahlavi dynasty was overthrown. SAVAK has been described as Iran's "most hated and feared institution" prior to the revolution of 1979 because of its practice of torturing and executing opponents of the Pahlavi regime.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

The on paper assertion of his third and fourth questioning is at least fourteen pages lengthy. It was moderately ordinary for SAVAK to powerfully acquire an assurance of alliance from political detainee before their liberation but for Sharīatī no such manuscript has been published. Unless it is supposed that the file was detached from his record, the absence of such a discerning document means that he never signed one.

Custody of political convict at Komiteh for too long (eighteen months) was weird, since the required could be acquired easily in a very short time. Alī Sharīatī was never put on trial, he did not have a legal term to serve. Tentatively could be argued that Sharīatī gave out eighteen months devoid of any legal accusation, since a denunciation would be impending and consequently assumed that Sharīatī would be put on trial.

Sharīatī was not like other usual political detainee. He was a scholastic and an eminent public figure with a significant following among the youth.

He was home-grown ideologue, spokesperson and writer of fundamental Islamic thoughts, manifest public and accessible to each and every one, Which SAVAK found rebellious and destabilizing. SAVAK pressurized him to get its own means and tried hard to exploit his influential personality.⁴⁶

According to some of his fellow inmates, Sharīatī's living conditions, compared to other prisoners, were rather privileged. Instead of the prison clothes his family was allowed to bring him grey clothes from home as long as they were not very different in style from the prison issue.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 364.

⁴⁷Ibid.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

Other than the psychological pressure, hardships and humiliation to which every prisoner at Komiteh was subjected, there is no indication that Sharīatī was ever physically tortured. He was, however, confronted with his students at Ershad, who were badly tortured.⁴⁸

A few months before his release, Sharīatī was informed that he should give an interview to a group of foreign journalist who was investigating charges of torture in Iranian prisons. Faced with the regular pressure put on him, Sharīatī tried to keep his morale.

Freedom

On March 20, 1975 foreign pressure and protest forced the Iranian establishment to release Dr. Sharīatī but he was kept under strict observation by the SAVAK.⁴⁹

Sharīatī's release from jail was unanticipated and it caused some assumptions on the government's intentions. Two completely diverse statements appeared; the first, as stated by Sharīatī himself, was that his freedom was due to the foreign pressure on the Iranian establishment.

According to Minachi "Sharīatī recounted that Hossein Zadeh had informed him that Shah had ordered his release after returning from a visit to Algiers to attend the summit meeting of the leaders of OPEC⁵⁰ countries."⁵¹

One of the old friends of Sharīatī, who had achieved high rank in 'Algerian National liberation Front'⁵², used his power with the Iranian government for his freedom. At that time, Algeria was intervening between Iran and Iraq.

⁴⁸Ibid., 334.

⁴⁹Ibid., 373.

⁵⁰Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

⁵¹ Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, 364.

The next and most significant clarification of the management motive (Rahnema, 200) was forwarded by Rowhani, whose view was intensely prejudiced against Sharīatī. His view point, however, is not so much considerable because its claims were based on the information of SAVAK.

After his freedom from detention center, ‘Alī and his family travelled to Mashhad to meet Muhammad Taqi and other friends. They went back to Tehran just after two weeks. His freedom from jail was definitely not less than a blessing, but the detention that was forced upon him was difficult and thorny to handle.

‘Alī Sharīatī described his state of mind during the first year of his release in these words:

“During this period I was not myself, I was simply trying to stay alive, and the only way to do so was to forget myself, that is to say, not to be myself, otherwise I would not have been able to put up with myself and would have died”.⁵³

He rarely met people during these eighteen months. The authorities remained unsure about his conduct, behaviour and links. All his activities were strictly observed. All the substantiation signified that he was found under regular and close observation; his engagements and his excursion were scrutinized. He was frequently convened to SAVAK command center, and threatened. Sharīatī started meeting people after 1976.

Migration and Death

Sharīatī was persuaded to move from Iran as restrictions bounded him. His confinement made him disappointed. He believed that he could no longer survive in Iran. His life had become painful as he could not read, write and think freely.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 365.

Dr. Ali Sharīatī on Islamic Thought

SAVAK not only pressurized him but also called in him regularly. On one instance, he was forced to write a commentary on the Mujahidin's policy on their ideological change. On another occasion, SAVAK powerfully suggested that Sharīatī should attach himself with a newly recognized institute headed by Naraqī. Sharīatī disliked the proposal of writing a commentary for SAVAK and this disheartened him too⁵⁴.

In February 1977, Sharīatī decided to leave Iran because he was not feeling good anymore to survive in Iran. Consequently, in June 1977, he travelled to England. He died in England due to heart attack in 1977.

“A report issued on 21st June 1977 identified ‘cardiac failure’ as the cause of his sudden death”⁵⁵.

His followers persistently alleged the involvement of SAVAK (the Iranian secret police) in his death. On 26th June 1977, Sharīatī's dead body was shifted to Damascus, where he was buried near the memorial of Hazrat Zeinab (Hazrat Imām Hussein's sister), a spiritual personality with whom Sharīatī was significantly identified.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 365.

⁵⁵ Rehnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 366.

⁵⁶ Ibid.