'ALI SHARI'ATI : RADICAL SHI'ISM

Dr. 'Ali Shari'ati though not a theologian himself but son of a prominent theologian distinguished himself in so many respects. He sought to give the Iranians, especially the younger generation, a progressive and revolutionary ideology to combat the cultural as well as political invasion of western imperialism. For the younger generation of the Iranian society the traditional methods of the clergy to bring them back to the traditional Islamic heritage was not appealing. Thus, despite the fact that the clergy had realized the urgency to communicate with the youth, they found themselves ill-equipped methodologically to direct the younger generation towards a meaningful re-orientation. Thus a 'truly intellectual elite, un-alienated from Islam, deeply rooted in the cultural tradition of Islamic Iran was needed to apply a new scientific method ... and explain the interaction of the Islamic message with the society.'

Ali Shari'ati calls himself a "rousanhafekr" (lit. intellectual). For him, a rousanhafekr is one who has an acute sense of responsibility towards his society and who is committed to the people.2 Ali Shari'ati's personality was his activism. He had been an active member of various organisations opposed to the Shah. He mobilized the younger generation of Iran against the monarchy, despotism and imperialism. No one influenced the Iranian youth as much as Shari'ati did. He is regarded as the ideologue and precursor of the Islamic revolution of 1979.3 Ali Shari'ati was a broad-minded and enlightened scholar. He studied a lot and wrote a lot. His interaction with a variety of intellectual groups sometimes opposed to each other broadened his vision. For so many years he had been in contact with leftist intellectuals and activists of Iran who exerted profound influence on him.

Ali Shari'ati was born on the 2nd of the Azermah 1312 A.H. (Solar)/23rd of November, 1933 A.D. in a small town, Marivan, in the

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2 'Ali Shari'ati, Az Koja Aghaz Konim (From Where Shall We Begin), p. 9.

country-side of the holy city of Mashhad. At the age of seventeen he completed higher secondary education from Mashhad in 1950. Then he was admitted to Teacher's Training Institute in Mashhad for a two year course of Basic Teaching Training. As he was keen to choose teaching profession, he joined a village school as a teacher in Ahmedabad in the suburb of Mashhad. But within four years he left the job for further education. He returned to Mashhad in 1955 and joined the newly established faculty of letters in Mashhad University where he got his degree in the first division. After graduation his name was recommended by the University authorities for higher studies abroad. He came to Paris to join Sorbonne University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1960.

4 See Anon., Zendaginame-ye Mujahid Shahid Doctor Ali Shari'ati. (n.p., n.d.), p.1; Another biographer of Ali Shari'ati, Dr. Asghar Ghassemi gives a different date. He gives December A.D. 1932 that corresponds to 9th/10th Month of 1311 A.H. (Solar), thus there is a difference of about one year (Dr. Asghar Ghassemi, "Ali Shari'ati" Soroush (Tehran), 3 (May, 1981), p. 24. However, most of the biographers agree on the year 1312 A.H. (Solar) as the year in which Ali Shari'ati was born. But most of them do not mention the date or month or both and contend to state "one of the day of the year 1312 A.H. (Solar)". See, for example, Yadnama-ye Doctor Shari'ati (Mashhad, n.d., vol.1, p. 3; For other important works on the life of Ali Shari'ati see, Ali Shari'ati, Kavir (n.p., 1348 AH Solar); Islam Maktab-e Mobarez special issue of Ali Shari'ati (Europe and U.S.A., 1984);; Yadnama-ye Salgard Hejrat va Shahadat Abu Dharr-e Zaman (n.p., 1357 A.H. Solar); Gholam Abbas Tavassoli, "Introduction" in Hamid Algar (trs.) On the Sociology of Islam (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 11-34.

5 'Ali Shari'ati, Kavir, pp. 5-11.
'Ali Shari'ati belonged to a middle class religious family. His family members were renowned for their deep knowledge of Islamic Sciences. A number of theologians and religious scientists who were highly esteemed for their scholarship in Iran came from this family. His father Mohammad Taqi Shari'ati, was a celebrated theologian. He had not only inherited traditional religious education but was well acquainted with modern education and disciplines of knowledge. The most important thing which 'Ali Shari'ati inherited from his father was social and political awareness. Thus in this early period of his life, his father played an important role in conditioning the mind of young Shari'ati. Shari'ati mentions his father as one of his "idols" (ma'budha-ye man) at several places in his writings.

The domestic environment coupled with an atmosphere of political, social and intellectual awakening played a crucial role in the development of 'Ali Shari'ati's personality. Besides religious education he acquired knowledge of Arabic under the able tutorship of his father. Later on, he studied French language also which was becoming popular at that time in the intellectual milieu of Iran as a means for modern ideas as against English which was

6 See Chapter 3.

disliked by the Iranians as a symbol of British imperialism. The period from his childhood to youth was marked by political, social as well as intellectual changes in Iranian society. These developments necessitated the emergence of a number of social, political and religious organizations which propagated one ideology or the other. These organizations attracted the students to their activities. 'Ali Shari'ati's bringing up in an environment of commitment to the society and people required him to associate himself with these organizations.

During this period, 'Ali Shari'ati came to terms with an organization known as Markaz-e Tablighat-e Hadigat-e Islami (Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truth).\(^8\) The organization was founded by some prominent reformists including his father. There was another semi-political organization known as "Jombeş-e Naqish-e Islami" (New Islamic Movement) associated with the former and founded by the same persons. The purpose of these organizations was to create political and social awareness among the people through religion. 'Ali Shari'ati involved himself deeply into the activities of these organizations. Probably at the instance of his father who encouraged him to join these societies, he soon became

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8 The name of the organization is given as 'Kanon-e Nashr-e Hadigat-e Islami' in Zendaginama-ye Mujahid Shahid Doctor Ali Shari'ati, p.4.
one of the most active members of these organizations. In the meantime he came across the Movement of Socialist Worshippers of God "Nehzat-e Khoda Farastan-e Socialist". It was this organization which in fact, served for him the platform to discover his potentialities and to develop his political and social consciousness. The influence of this organization is clearly visible in the make up of 'Ali Shari'ati's mind. The organization as it is evident from its name, was a religious organization with a left-from-the-centre inclination. It seems that during the time of his association with this organization he studied socialist literatures including the works of Karl Marx and other socialist writers who wrought great influence on his mind so much so that he became a staunch admirer of Marx. He was closely associated with

9 Nehzat-e Khodaparastan-e Socialist (The Movement of Socialist Worshippers of God) was the group which was established secretly in 1323 and 1324 A.H. (Solar) in Tehran. This organization, was founded by the active Muslim Youths who emphasized Tawhid, but believed that the Islamic economic system is a kind of socialism. They also believed in a revolutionary movement which could regenerate the Iranian Society. The strategy of the organization was strictly secret. In its early stages it was an intellectual movement which tried to spread its ideology and train its cadre remaining underground. Later on, differences arose in the organization itself whether it should confine to ideological work only or participate in the political struggle for the Nationalization of petroleum led by Dr. Musaddeq', Zendaginama-ye Mujahid Shahid Doctor Ali-Shari'ati, p.5.
this organization and actively took part in its secret activities. As soon as 'Ali Shari'ati got himself admitted to the Faculty of Letters, of the Mashhad University, he had already imbibed the influence of leftist ideology. He joined "Nehzat-e Mogavamat-e Melli" (National Resistance Movement) which was a new front of Mosaddeq's "Jebh-e Melli" (National Front) which was banned by the Shah.

During his stay in Paris he made a special study of the writings of contemporary humanists, existentialists and sociologists like, Erich Fromme, Albert Comus, Arnold Toynbee, George Gurevich, Jean Paul Sartre and Islamologist like Louis Massignon, Jacques Berque etc. He extensively quotes from their writings in his lectures and writings which show that he had sufficiently grasped their thoughts.  

10 Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani, Dr. Yadollah Sahabi, Engineer Bazargan and AQA Reza Zanjani were among the leaders of the National Resistance Movement.  
11 'Ali Shari'ati, Kavi, pp. 78-79; Shari'ati describes his association with Louis Massignon in glowing terms: "I have a humble opportunity of being associated with him during 1960 to 1962 A.D. It was the time when he was engaged in doing research on the political, moral and spiritual personality of Fatima. I helped him in collecting, reading, translating and discussing Persian works relevant to this topic. These two years are among the most proud-worthy (pur iftikhar) times of my life, for, I worked with the great man on a great work. But what gave me immense pleasure and made my life meaningful and proud-worthy was the impact of this great, solemn, decent, genius and intellectual soul. He was a combination of the most eminent qualities which a man could possess ... I have not seen a more beautiful personality (zibatar) than this man for the whole of my life".
The other dimension of Ali Shari'at'i's activities in Paris was his close association with Iranian Freedom Movement. There were several organisations which were working against the Pahlavi regime in Paris as in other parts of the world. There were a number of leaders who were living in exile in Paris at that time. 'Ali Shari'ati developed close contacts with them. He had also close links with the Iranian students organisations formed outside Iran such as "Ittehadiya-ye Anjoman-e Islami Danishjuyan dar Urupa" (Union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe), Anjoman-e Danishjuyan-e Islami dar Amrika va Kanada (Students Islamic Association in America and Canada). The organ of these two organisations, Islam: Maktab-e Mobarez, was a widely read magazine among the Iranians exiles living in Europe. Ali Shari'ati contributed a number of articles in this journal.

In 1965 'Ali Shari'ati founded Hosseiniya-ye Irshad along with many other reformers including Ayatollah Motahheri. His association with the Hosseiniya-ye Irshad was the most creative period of his life. Most of the important lectures of 'Ali Shari'ati were delivered here. His lectures drew crowds in large number and cassettes of his speeches were sold in thousands. The Seminari was closed by the government as it was found creating anti-government atmosphere. Since then 'Ali Shari'ati remained under strict vigilance of the secret intelligence of the regime,
SAVAK, ultimately he managed to escape Iran under fake passport and came to London. He was found mysteriously dead on June 1977 in his apartment suspected to be killed by the SAVAK. He is buried in Damascus.

According to 'Ali Shari'ati the crux of the problems of Iranian society rested in the continuous process of westernization in the name of modernization. For him, this has caused the worst kind of alienation in Iranian society, that is, cultural alienation. He says that modernization itself is not wrong but what has been done in Iran in the name of modernization was to mould Iran in a western society and made the people blind followers of western culture and civilization. This has alienated people from their cultural orientation and cultural heritage that is Islam. Like others he also held the imperialist powers responsible for this as they wanted to perpetuate their political and economic domination on Iran like other third world countries. He says:

"Europe has realized that in order to be able to rob the East, to ride on her back, and to easily deceive her, it is imperative to strip her from her personality. Once this is accomplished, she will proudly follow the West and with unspeakable lunacy and thirst she will consume western goods."

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Depriving a nation of its history and cutting it off from its culture with subsequent alienation of the present generation from its cultural resources, have reached a point that the cultures which possessed the prudent religions, most progressive philosophical thinking, the most delicate arts, created the grandest civilization and contributed the most experienced human society, today have become so alienated with their past possessions that they have been transformed into a sort of human being that has to re-learn how to dress, eat, read, and write! Why are these societies living in poverty and ignorance while the west and its thinkers, by looting such cultures, are trying to enrich their own cultures?" 

This has been a permanent theme of another lay intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Al-e Ahmad's most prominent work, *Gharabzadgi*, is based upon the same theme. The term, *gharabzadgi*, a unique term coined by Al-e Ahmad to denote the westernization of Iranian society is extensively used by 'Ali Shari' ati to condemn western culture and westernization as it existed in Iran. He seems to be profoundly influenced by Al-e Ahmad's ideas in this regard. He thus called upon the Iranian people in particular and Muslims and


other third world countries in general to stop following the West and return to their own "selves" (Khvishtan). 15

As mentioned above the fundamental problem with Shari'ati was to give Iran a progressive and revolutionary ideology. He, therefore, like Ahmed Kasravi defined Islam as an "ideology". According to him ideology is a "concerned faith" dealing with "how the present condition must be". He says 'Ideology explains my condition, where I am and in what period of history I am, and what condition myself, my people, my country, and humanity are in, relative to various battlefronts'. 16 He says that Islam is such an ideology. It creates awareness and sense of responsibility. Islam as an ideology inspires hardwork, militancy and commitment as compared to other cultural or historical religions. 17

'Ali Shari'ati emphasizes the need to reinterpret many of the religious dogmas in order to explain Islam as a positive social

15 On this see two important works of Ali Shari'ati, Bazgasht be Khveshtan (Return to one's own self) and Bazgasht be kudam Khvēsh (Return to which self). Both are published together in the series of Asar-e Shari'ati under the title Bazgasht; see also his Tamaddun va Tajaddud and Insan va Islam.


force that can once again eliminate the Dark Ages and bring about the era of enlightenment. According to him religious tenets are not rigid and inflexible; they are subject to changed interpretations in the light of new developments. He considers *ijtihad* as the tool to re-interpret religious tenets according to the exigencies of the changing time. He, therefore, describes *ijtihad* as absolute necessity in order to interpret the religious notions creatively and progressively. The practice of *ijtihad* is regarded by him a compulsory thing if the Muslim society went to progress. He thus defines *ijtihad* as a "continuous, relentless, systematic and synthetic thinking". In this sense *ijtihad*, then becomes a fundamental principle of perpetual revolution. According to him *ijtihad* is a heavy burden on the shoulder of learned and educated men. Further, *ijtihad* is not academic work which is done

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22 Ibid., n. 13.


for the sake of academic institutions and publications. It is rather a rethinking or a re-interpretation for the sake of people to guide them and to keep the religion alive and suitable to the changing circumstances and requirements.25

'Ali Shari'ati's training in sociology and his keen interest in the discipline enabled him to discover sociological notions in the Qur'an and Tradition. Although he did not claim to evolve a sociology of Islam but he is always inclined to give sociological interpretations of the Islamic tenets and concepts. He himself says:

'With regard to researches pertaining to Islam, I believe in a definite principle. I feel that this principle is true to all the discussions regarding religion and Islam. Thus instead of analysing the belief or a religious dogma from scientific or logical point of view or from theories of physics and chemistry or from scholasticism or philosophy and testifying its truthfulness or falsity in this form or through that means like classical or modern 'ulama', we should adopt a principle, more satisfying from the point of view of social life".26

Thus as mentioned above Shari'ati's thrust in this regard was to give a new interpretation or sociological interpretation to a number of Islamic terms and precepts, such as tawhid (Unity of God), imamat (leadership), ummat (Islamic community), intezar

26 'Ali Shari'ati, Intezar-e Mazhab-e I'teraz, p.17.
(awaiting of Imam of the Age) etc. According to him the sociology of Islam is rooted in what he calls the world-view of tawhid (jahani-ye tawhid). He discusses the world-view of tawhid in its three dimensions: first, as a human philosophy (insanshenasi) secondly as a philosophy of history (falsafa-ye tarikh) and thirdly as a sociology (jam'ashenasi). According to Shari'ati, the sociological significance of tawhid is paramount in Islam. It is a social phenomenon, and not merely a theological concept. It is the only philosophy which can produce classless and just society and it is the only philosophy which can resolve the contradictions in the society. Although it is not a new idea but it yields new ideas and impetus to the members of the society according to the requirement of the time and space. Tawhid creates a just and ideal society - the utopia (madina-ye fazila). The believer in tawhid is genuine, free, secure and liberal human being.

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27 In a series of lectures at Hosseiniya-ye Irshad he presented a complete scheme of the Philosophy of tawhid. These lectures - ten in all - were printed in a book, Islam-shenasi (Islamology). Each of these dimensions are discussed in separate chapters. Since another book by Shari'ati with the same title exists which is the compilation of his lectures on Islam delivered in Mashhad we will refer henceforth the former as Islam-shenasi (Tehran) and the latter "Islam-shenasi (Mashhad)".

28 See 'Ali Shari'ati, Islamshenasi (Tehran), pp. 75-76.

According to Shari'ati there are two kinds of religions in the history: the religion of tawhid, and the religion of shirk (polytheism). The former is the legacy of Abraham while the latter is the religion which thrived in all the societies. The two religions had always been at war with each other throughout the history. He says that kufr does not mean atheism as is generally believed. In fact it is a kind of theism. The word kufr literally means (to cover) here it means "covering the truth of religion (hagigat-e Din) through another religion (din)". While the religion of shirk (din-e shirk) creates conflict disunity and war in the society through metaphysical beliefs, the religion of tawhid (din-e tawhidi) creates harmony and unity in the society. It expresses itself "in the form of equality of humanity (vahdat-e bashariyat) and as equality of all races, and all individuals and equality of their rights, values and status in the society." This Abrahamic religion i.e. religion of tawhid was revolutionary (din-e ingelab) from the very beginning and it never supported status quo (vaza'ye mowjud), while other religions, i.e. religions of shirk always supported and justified the

30 'Ali Shari'ati, Mazhab 'Alayh-e Mazhab, p.5.
31 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
status quo. The views expressed by Shari'ati in this regard deserve to be quoted in full:

"The religion of shirk (din-e shirk) thrived in history in two forms. One, as just said, in justifying the status quo (touzih-e va'az-e moujud). We find that in history human societies are divided into the classes of pure and impure, master and slave, possessed and dispossessed, ruler and ruled, free and captive, the group which is racially noble and the group which is comprised of untouchables, the inferior nation (mellat) and the superior nation, and the dominating class and the downtrodden class. The religion of shirk has served as a justification for this system; it has been a factor which contributed in perpetuating this system. This was in direct opposition to the religion of tawhid which is the destroyer of this system. Religion of shirk says: there should be many gods in the world which would bring into existence many groups (geroh) and many classes (tabagat) and many races in the society. A few people could dispossess the others by force. They usurp the economic and social resources and enjoy privileges .... Religion i.e. religion of shirk took the responsibility of protecting this system. Its function was to make people content and subservient .... Contradiction and class conflict is consolidated by the religion of shirk.

On the other hand the Abrahimic religion aims at destroying the status quo. Its Prophets, always stood against the rulers — temporal, spiritual or social, destroyed all the idols, physical, human, economic or material. They gradually eliminated all the manifestation of the religion of shirk i.e. the religion of status quo".32

He further says that the primitive society when there was no ownership, was a tawhidi society. And as soon as the concept of ownership crept into the society it became the society of shirk.33

32 Ibid., pp. 23-26.

33 'Ali Shari'ati, Shirk va Tawhid, p.16.
Thus ownership (malekiyat) should alone be considered as 'social structure' (zirbena). Now there are two types of ownerships: the social ownership (malekiyat-e iitema'i) and individual or monopolistic ownership (malekiyat-e inhesari). The former represents tawhidic structure while the latter represents the structure of shirk.

The whole argument of 'Ali Shari'ati revolves round the story of Abel and Cain. He says that Abel and Cain should be taken as symbols of two kinds of social phenomena or two kinds of human nature in the world. The former represents tawhid while the latter represents shirk. The philosophy of history according to Shari'ati is also based upon the story of Abel and Cain. History, which according to him is the name of continuous social process, has passed through only two stages corresponding to the two social structures (zirbena) or two kinds of ownerships (malekiyat), and

36 'Ali Shari'ati, Shirk va Tawhid, p.12.
38 See 'Ali Shari'ati, Falsafa-ye Tarikh (Philosophy of History); Islamshenasi, chap. 4.
not in six or seven stages as in Marxist theories. He says:

"Here, I believe in a particular view which is this that basically zirbena is two, not more than two. They represent neither bourgeoisie, nor feudalism nor capitalism, nor serfdom and slavery. Zirbena, that is upon which the whole social system is based... is only two, not six or seven: one is monopolistic ownership (malekiyat-e inhesari) and other is social ownership (malekiyat-e ittema'i)."

40 'Ali Shari'ati, Mashin dar Asarat-e Mashinism, p.17.

He further says that what appears to be a change in the stage of slavery to serfdom or serfdom to feudalism is not structural change; it is rather only superstructural change; 'In the structure of ownership, superstructures (rubena) change. Superstructures are slavery, serfdom, poliariate, Bourgeoisie. Bourgeoisie itself is not a structure, it is superstructure (rubena). It is correct that the form of relationship between the ruler and the ruled was different during the period of slavery from that of the period of serfdom; their relationship was relatively better. Similarly the relationship between these two classes changed during the period of feudalism and so on. But this class relationship (ravabet-e tabagjati) cannot be termed as the structure of the society....

I was a slave in the beginning and my owner was the master. Then I became serf and my owner became my lord. Then I became peasant and my master became the landlord. Now I am a worker and my master is an employer.... Ibid., pp. 19-20.
Thus one of the structures represents collective ownership which means a classless society and the other represents monopolistic which means a class ridden society. The former is called "zirbana-ye ijtema'i" (socialist society) and the latter "zirbana-e tabagati" (class society). It is only ownership, therefore, which makes a distinction between social structure and class structure. In Qur'anic terminology, the former is called Abelian society or structure of Abel and the latter is called Canian society or the structure of Cain. Upto the time when there was no conception of private ownership, there existed only one class in the society. There was no ownership in the nature, the people exploited the nature collectively and divided the products among themselves according to their needs. No one suspended the rights of the others. Everyone was treated as equal and brother. People differed in skill and power but there did not exist any difference of status, individual ownership, and deprivation of others. Slowly there emerged a class which possessed all these things while the majority of people remained dispossessed, who gradually became dependent upon the small group who owned means of production.

According to him, the Canian structure is again divided into two social classes (tabagat-e ijtema'i): The Cain's class

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41 Ibid., p.18.

(tabaga-ye Gabil) and the Abel's class (tabaga-ye Habil). The class of Cain consisted of exploiters, private owners, rulers and other privileged people. The class of Abel consisted of the dispossessed, exploited and deprived masses (nass). The former is always in minority but dominates the latter. The latter is always in majority but is exploited by the former. Again, the class of Cain is composed of three classes (tabagat) zor, zor and Tazveer i.e. the forces of political power, the forces of economic exploitation and the forces of religious exploitation. In the Qur'anic terms they are called: malik or mala, mutrif and ralib respectively. He claims that throughout the history the three forces have always joined hands in the exploitation (istismar) of the people. In his book Hossein Varis-e Adam, he points out that in each society the Canian structure contains these

'The wing represented by Abel is that of the subject and the oppressed i.e., the people those who throughout history have been slaughtered and enslaved by the system of Cain, the system of private ownership which has gained ascendancy over human society. The war between Cain and Abel is the permanent war of history which has been waged by every generation. The banner of Cain has always been held high by the ruling classes and the desire to avenge the blood of Abel has been inherited by succeeding generations of his descendants - the subjected people who have fought for justice, freedom and true faith in a struggle that has continued, one way or another, in every age.
three classes. In Sassanid society, for example, there were three kinds of the fire of Ahuramazda. In India the three classes are represented by Kshatriyas, money lenders, and Brahmins. They used three weapons for the exploitation tegh, tala and tasbih (sword, golo and tasbih) symbolised in istibdad, istismar and istihmar (despotism, exploitation and the deception of the clergy).

According to Ali Shari'ati, all the three forces of exploitation were always opposed by tawhid. It never justified contradiction, pluralism or class system. Because tawhid in its social dimension aims to remove all sorts of contradiction and pluralism from the society. Furthermore, tawhid gives those who believe in it and who are brought up in its school a critical outlook (binesh-e inteqadi), in every walk of life - material, spiritual and social. It also gives people a mission and a responsibility to destroy or change whatever they do not like and whatever is false (batil) and to replace it by what they think truth (hag).

46 Ibid., p. 25. He points out: In the Qur'an, the pharaoh is the symbol of the ruling political power; Croesus (Qarun) is the symbol of the ruling economic power; and Bala'am is the symbol of the official, ruling clergy.
According to Shari'ati history is the name of struggle between two kinds of religions (mazhab, din). In history, religion was not against irreligiousness or atheism (bidini). 'Religion was against religion and religion fought against religion'. The man always believed in religion. Not only culture, ethics and philosophies of human societies were based on religion but their economy and physical forms were also based upon religion.\textsuperscript{49}

There is no doubt that 'Ali Shari'ati was greatly influenced by Marx in his sociological thought. He adopted dialectical method and almost tried to explain the Marxian theory of social changes and philosophy of history with slight changes.\textsuperscript{50} It would not be wrong to say that in so many respects Shari'ati adopted Marxist ideas and expressed them in Islamic terminology. However, Shari'ati was a great critic of Marx's concept of man which according to him

\textsuperscript{49} See \textit{ibid.}, pp. 23-28.


\textsuperscript{51} Soheyl Amini, \textit{op. cit.}, p.28; observes: 'To claim that Shari'ati has not been influenced by Marx would be a gross misinterpretation. By the same token to label him a Marxist would unquestionably be an admission of one's lack of understanding of Shari'ati's general theoretical assumption.'
undermines the spiritual aspect of man and reduced man to a material and economic being. Yet Shari'ati uses dialectic in his concept of man also. In his opinion, man is a dialectical being; he is half spiritual in so far he possesses the spirit of God, and half material in so far he is made up of clay. He possesses two opposite poles in himself: "God's spirit" and "debased clay". Again as Shari'ati claims he derives his ideas from Qur'anic anthropology and the story of creation of man.

A comparative study of different theories of humanism is a favourite subject for 'Ali Shari'ati. He points out that only Islam gives a balanced and correct understanding of the existence of man. Other philosophies whether ancient Greek or present day Existentialism, Marxism, materialism or spiritualism and mysticism have failed to perceive man in his real and genuine existence. They are therefore unsuccessful to give a "balance human ethics". He attacks "biologism" "Sociologism" or materialism for accepting only material dimension of man. While mysticism and

52 See 'Ali Shari'ati, Insan Islam va Maktabha-ye Maghrebi Zamin (Man Islam and Western Philosophies) (Tehran, n.d.) For English translation of "Insan Islam va Maktabha-ye Maghrebi Zamin" and a few of his writings regarding the same; see Ali Shari'ati, Marxism and other Western Fallacies, trans. by R. Campbell (Berkeley 1980).

53 For his conception of man, see his "Insan va Islam". For further detail see his Islamshenasi (Tehran); Insan, Islam va Maktabha-ye Maghrebi Zamin. "Insan va Islam" is a collection of six lectures including his lecture "Insan va Islam" which all deal with his concept of modern man.
religion are criticized by him for accepting only another half of man, i.e. the spiritual one. He points out that only Islam exalted man to the status of vicegerent of God on Earth (Khalifa ye Khoda). This dialectical being, i.e., "man" is in constant movement from highest of high spirit of God to "basest of all clay" and vice versa.

Apart from Western humanism, he criticizes other western concepts also. For example, democracy does not appear to him suitable in a progressive society. For in a society which in need of rapid revolution and change, democracy is not fruitful enough. The principle of democracy is opposed to the principle of revolutionary change and advancement. The political leadership of the progressive ideology which runs against the tide of tradition cannot be elected and supported by that society. It is, therefore, revolutionary leadership is against the principle of democracy. 54

As a champion of "tawhidi universalism" he criticizes the various kinds of nationalism as narrow territorial concept:

Nationalism (Nationalism, Chauvanism, Racism) which is a territorial concept based on racism is against the concept of ummat based on ideology. It shatters the human society into pieces. 55

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54 'Ali Shari'ati, Jame'ashenasi-ye Ummat va Imamat, p.162.

He says that it was the concept of nationalism which was used as a tool by the imperialist forces to break the Islamic community into many groups. It was the "sword of nationalism" which cut the "universal Islamic caliphate" in a large number of pieces during this century. 56

Ummat, according to him, is the most proper word to denote grouping as compared to various other terms prevalent at present, like, tribe (qabila) group (geroh) nation (mulla) people (gawm) or sect (firqa). He gives a dynamic and progressive interpretation of ummat. He says that ummat (Islamic community) based on ideology (of tawhid) is a living organism, and an integrated personality (shakhs) the members of which are bound by a single tie and are inseparable. He says:

"When I talk of society (jame'a) I mean a person (shakhs), conscious, thinking and sensitive being who possesses will, faith .... he is not a social individual. Society is not the agglomeration of individuals, it is rather a composition of individual elements,.... society is a collective conscience. It is not like a crowd in a cinema or gathering in an examination hall. It is not a store of grain which is nothing but collection of wheat and barley. Society, therefore, is not a collection of personalities. It is itself a person and a man". 57

56 Ibid., p. 132.
57 'Ali Shari'ati, Bazgasht, p. 53.
Elsewhere he defines the *ummat* as the community of individuals who have a common philosophy, common beliefs, common religion and common path; they not only share in their common thoughts but also in their way of life. It is an ideological community. Its members may belong to any race, tribe or territory, but they think in one direction and have common faith. Rejecting the modern concept of nationhood based on language, race or territory as against the concept of Islamic *ummāt* he says that 'the ideal Islamic community is not a group based on the concept of one nation or society; It is not a society composed of those peoples having common language, customs, race or history. Nor it is a society composed of individuals having a common form of livelihood, work or profession'. Thus, according to Shari'ati, such conceptions as Iranism, Arabism or Turkism are contradictory to the concept of *ummāt*. He criticizes the Iranian nationalists and the Shah's efforts to identify the Iranian people with the ancient Persian cultural heritage as well as Arab nationalists who sought to revive their connection with the ancient cultures.


59 Ibid., p. 71.

60 'Ali Shari'ati, *Tashayyu'-e 'Alavi va Tashayyu'-e Safavi*, pp. 131-132.
Shari'ati points out that difference may exist in an ummat but they do not hamper its revolutionary progress. For example, there exists differences in Shi'ism and Sunnism but they are of juridical nature and not of fundamental and ideological nature. For him Shi'ism is a particular point of view and approach in understanding Islam (Yek nam-e faimidan-e Islam) as different from Sunnism which adopts a different point of view in understanding Islam. Thus emphasizing that Shi'ism is nothing but just a point of view which conceives some of the texts of Islam in a particular way, he says that Shi'ism may be considered as an adjective to Islam, i.e. 'Shi'i Islam' (Islam-e Shi'i). He further says that all of us believe in the reality of Islam (asalat-e Islam). However, we differ in our understanding of Islam. But this is just an academic difference (ikhtelaf-e ilmi). The differences between the Shi'is and the Sunnis in regard to beliefs are just like the differences between the Shi'i theologians themselves who sometime differ in many basic issues.62

Although Shari'ati addresses the whole Islamic community and the Third World in general his immediate addresses were the

61 'Ali Shari'ati, Shi'a Yek Hezb-e Tamam (Shi'a a Perfect Party), vol. II, p.20.

62 See ibid., vol.II, p.18-19; see also his Tashayyu-e 'Alavi va Tashayyu-e Safavi.
Iranians who were Shi'is. Therefore, really speaking his main concern was Shi'ism and its tenets. He himself says that 'whenever I talk of Islam I mean Shi'ism' as both are synonymous. He uses shi'i percepts and notions in order to convey his message. Thus the concept of imamate and related notions are also dealt with in its sociological dimension.

He defines imamat as the leadership of the ummat which is the fundamental need of the society:

Imam is one who, by virtue of his existence, by his thoughts speeches and his mode of life tells men how far they could proceed and to what extent they could progress. Therefore, imam is one who guides man not only in one direction of political, economic, and social relationships in a limited time (he is a leader, caliph or amir in this meaning and this is limited to his life time only), he rather presents examples for man in every human matter.  

According to him the function of imamat is same as that of prophecy as far as social and secular matters are concerned because of this reason the term imam is employed by the Quran for the Prophets. So the position of imamat (and therefore, its functions) was inherited by the imams from the Prophet. He argues that the term imam was spoken in the Qur'an in its general meaning of guidance and leadership.

64 'Ali Shari'ati, Jame'ashenasi ye-Ummat va Imam, p.597.
65 Ibid.
Although he believes that the twelve Imams were appointed by God on account of their relative merit for leadership of the community and not on any hereditary principles, he refuses to ascribe any extra-human qualities to them. He holds that the imams were all human beings; they lived in human society, had physical structure, behaved like human beings and did not possess any special attribute which was beyond human nature. According to him an 'Imam is a "superman" (insan-e mafouq), and not a "meta-human being" (mafouq-e insan) who belongs to a different species'. There is not much difference between an Imam and a leader as far as his functions of the guidance of society are concerned. He writes the position of Imam in the following words:

"The Imam is a human being whose existence, spiritual behaviour and his way of life should guide mankind how he ought to be and how his life should be. This definition, as a continuity of the history, enjoyed by leaders, monarchs and even by lords of ancient mythology from practical point of view, was enjoyed by Imams also. They are the physical realities of the values of faith, human realization of philosophical proposition, tangible examples and visible realities by whom a school is interpreted and persuades man to follow it. In their person there is an ideology and reality embodied; values, ideas, righteousness and responsibility are embodied in the like blood and bone."

67 'Ali Shari'ati, Jame'ishenasi-ye Ummat va Imamat, p.102.
68 Ibid., p. 97.
Although he did not refuse to believe in the ghaybat of the last Imam and his return, he rejects to discuss the matter scientifically as useless. On the other hand, he discusses the matter in the light of what impact the awaiting of Imam of the Age (Imam-e Zaman) put on the society and its members.Replying to the question whether he believed that a person can have an unlimited life, he said: 'Let us pay our attentions to a more important problems of life instead of devoting our minds and thoughts to these abstract philosophical questions. It is more important to know that what positive or negative effects its belief or disbelief could have on the human destiny'.

Like Mctahheri he also describes the concept of the ghaybat in its "positive" and "negative" implications. Like him, he also tries to prove that the awaiting of Imam of the Age does not lead to stagnation and apathy; on the contrary it activates the society for a progressive movement. This is called "intezar-e mosbat".

Shari'ati believed that the leadership of the society should neither go into the hands of spiritual authority (ruhaniyyat) nor the pseudo intellectuals (i.e. those under the influence of western thought and culture). He says that the leadership should be in the

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70 Ibid., p. 17.
71 See ibid., passim.
hands of enlightened intellectuals roushanfekr. He is against those "intellectuals" who indulge only in "mental work." On the other hand roushanfekr is precisely defined by him as a 'man who possesses self-consciousness in the historical and social time and space in which he lives. The self-consciousness, naturally, gives him a sense of responsibility. A roushanfekr is a self-conscious and responsible being. He many and may not be educated. However, if a roushanfekr is educated he will be more effective. Of course at the early stages of his campaign education is useful but as time passes on, an uneducated individual can play a more important role ....

Shari'ati was a bitter critic of the clergy and its role in the society. He attacked them for their stagnation and apathy towards social problems. He held them responsible for distorting the progressive and dynamic concepts of Shi'ism. He says that the clergy altered the true Shi'ism, which in his word was a progressive and revolutionary ideology, into a philosophy of justifying the oppression, despotism and tyranny of the establishment. Like Ahmad Kasravi, 'Ali Shari'ati is of the view that Shi'ism as

73 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
74 Ibid.,
practised today does not represent real Shi‘ism. It has been
distorted by both the rulers and the clergy for their own vested
interests. In his book Tashayyu‘-e ‘Alavi va Tashayyu‘-e Safavi, he
vehemently criticizes the Safavid monarchs and the Safavid clergy.
The book highlights the sharp contrast which exists between original
Shi‘ism and distorted Shi‘ism. The former is termed by him as
‘Alavid Shi‘ism (Tashayyu‘-e Alavi) and the latter as Safavid Shi‘ism
(Tashayyu‘-e Safavi). According to ‘Ali Shari‘ati, contemporary
Shi‘ism represents the latter kind of debased Shi‘ism.  

In this book he traces the history of the Shi‘ism and tries
to show that how the Safavid rulers distorted it with the help
of the clergy. According to him it can be traced to the political
rivalry of the Safavids against the Ottoman Caliphs, the Arabs and
the Uzbek rulers with whom they fought. All their enemies happened
to be the Sunnis. Thus according to Shari‘ati, it was political
animosity that led Shah Isma‘il to establish his empire on two
distinct principles: (1) Shi‘ism (Mazhab-e Shi‘i) and (2) Iranianism
(Melliyat-e Irani), because his enemies were Sunnis and non
Iranians. By propagating Shi‘ism and Iranianism they intended to

75 ‘Ali Shari‘ati, Tashayyu‘-e ‘Alavi va Tashayyu‘-e Safavi,
p. 46.
make a separate identity for the Iranians religiously and nationally. He writes:

It was the great manipulation on the part of the Safavids that they established their rule on two basic principles: (1) Shi'ism and (2) Iranism. These two basic principles cut Iran apart from the great Islamic society and put it against the Ottomans who were the rival power of the Safavids .... Safavids propagated Iranism to make Iran a force against the Islamic Caliphate. ⁷⁶

Shari'ati points out a number of factual distortions and fabrications such as the story of a Sasanid princess Shaharbano's marriage with Imam Husayn. ⁷⁷ 'Ali Shari'ati says that this false story and many other such stories were purposefully fabricated and propagated. The purpose was to separate Iranian identity from its mainstream to create animosity between the Iranians and the rest of the Muslim world and to link the Iranians with Sasanid heritage. According to 'Ali Shari'ati, a fulfledged propaganda programme was planned. ⁷⁸ The fourth Imam Sajjad (Ali b. Husayn b. Alil was portrayed as the most dignified Imam, the first in the chain of "dual-raced Imams". Because he was the first to inherit both Hashimite and Sasanid qualities. The so-called Iranian origin of the Imam was consistently propagated. 'Ali Shari'ati also points out,

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 111.
⁷⁷ See ibid., p. 116 ff.
⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 126.
why Fatima who was the sole link between prophecy and \textit{imamat} was overshadowed by Shaharbano to make the latter the link between \textit{imamat} and Sasanid heritage in Safavid literature. He writes:

"Such a dual Imam was a born to the Safavid Shi'ism - which was the reappearance of ruins of "old Iranianism in the new religion" - the representative of the Iranian government in the Islamic \textit{Imamat}; the inclusion of remains of Caesar into the house of the Prophet ... Consequently a new \textit{shu'ubi-shi'ism} was invented which was full of contradictions."

Shari'ati says that the Safavids not only changed the concept of \textit{imamat}, but also tried to interpret the Qur'anic concepts of \textit{tawhid} and prophethood in such a way that these can be differentiated from Sunni interpretations. They made changes even in such rituals as pilgrimage and prayer so that in the mosque and in \textit{hajj} they should not have anything common with the Sunnis.\textsuperscript{80} They also innovated a number of practices to create a cleavage between the Sunnis and Shi'a. For example, it became a common practice to abuse the first three caliphs in the sermons of the Friday prayers. Public cursing known as \textit{tabarra} was made compulsory. Such innovations as the mourning procession \textit{ta'ziyadari} and inflicting injury upon body were made common practices by the Safavids.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79 Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{80 Ibid., p. 36 ff.}
\textsuperscript{81 Ibid., pp. 206-207; Shari'ati thinks that most of these practices were borrowed from the Christian West such as the practices of inflicting injuries upon body which was prevalent among the Christians of the Eastern Europe.}
The fundamental concepts of Shi'ism such as imamat and 'adalat were also distorted. To show how the concepts of imamat were distorted Shari'ati quotes a number of the passages from the theological literature of the Safavid period such as Jawahir al-Walaya and Bihar al-Imbar." He points out that in these sources imams are described as the ones who receive revelation (wahi); they do not have shadows; they never sleep; they are supposed to be given power to create and govern the universe etc. 'Ali Shari'ati says that the status of imams in these sources has been exalted to that of God. They have been ascribed with those divine powers which exclusively belong to God. According to him these conceptions are against the genuine Shi'i beliefs. In this way, writes Shari'ati, the religion which was fighting against the establishment became a part of the establishment itself, and the force which fought for the freedom of oppressed people became an instrument of oppression'. He gives instances from history to show that whenever a progressive ideology gets the official patronage it becomes the part of the establishment or in other words becomes institution of the government and loses its spirit. He further says 'Islam itself was a revolutionary movement until it became an

82 See ibid., pp. 173-185.
official ideology, institutionalized in the form of Caliphate. The same thing happened to Shi'ism. It changed from a *imam-e motaharrek* to *imam-e motahajjar*. He says:

Shi'ism witnessed two stages which are completely distinct from each other. In *gurun-e awwal* it was the manifestation of "Islam the movement" against "Islam the institution" (Sunniism). This was the stage of revolution and movement in Shi'ism. But after the Safavids Shi'ism transformed itself from a movement (harkat) into an institution (nezam).

On account of these ideas and his criticism of clergy, his relations with the latter remained bitter in most of the part of his career. He was bitterly attacked by the clergy, particularly the lower clergy. He was charged of being a Communist a Kasravite, a Baha'i, so on and so forth. He seldom cared to engage in polemics with those akhunds (the low rank clergy) until and unless something substantial was written against him.

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85 Ibid., p. 46.

86 For example, Shari'ati wrote *Naghad bar Katab-e Brrasi* (A Critique of the book Brrasi) to refute some of the objection put forward by a theologian of Tehran. He has also referred to some of the objections in *Mizgard: Pasokh be So' alat va enteqadat*. See also Ali Shari'ati, *Nama-ye az aga-ye Nasser Makarem* in *Haft az Mejahid Shahid Doctor Ali Shari'ati*, pp. 27-30.
A close friend of Ali Shari'ati mentions that part of Shari'ati's criticism of clergy was due to his personal experience with the clergy. According to him Shari'ati's contempt for the clergy increased during his association with the Hosseniya-ye Irshad, particularly when the clerical members of the seminary like Ayatollah Mollaheri, left it because they thought that Ali Shari'ati was politicizing the seminary.\(^\text{37}\) However, in the latter part of his life he seems to have reviewed his bitter attitude towards clergy and praised some of the positive contributions made by the clergy.\(^\text{38}\)

As mentioned above the fundamental objective of 'Ali Shari'ati was to provide a progressive and revolutionary ideology for the masses to arouse them against despotism of the Shah. Thus,

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37 Abdulaziz Sachedina, op. cit., p. 206; see also Sharough Akhavi, Religion and Politics in Iran: The Clergy State Relation During Pahlavi Period, p. 139.

38 Abdulaziz Sachedina says 'In the lectures towards the end of his career, he Shari'ati was aware of his over sensitivity and over-reaction to valid criticism of his own shortcomings as well as those that he landed against some of the religious leaders, and had accordingly revised his stance. He was deeply concerned that some of his lectures were mis-construed as stemming from his personal dislike for an alumnus. Abdulaziz Sachedina, op. cit., p. 203. For Shari'ati's positive comments on the Iranian clergy such as his praise for clergy's anti West and anti-imperialist campaign see 'Ali Shari'ati, Itihad va Nazariya-ye Ingelab-e Da'eml and Mizgardi: Pasokh Be So'ulat va Entegadat.
he always tried to explain Shi'i dogmas in progressive and revolutionary language. This task of Shari'ati became more acute during the late 1960s and early 1970s, thus his interpretation of Shi'i dogmas in this period became more revolutionary. In a work of this period "Shi'a yek Hezb-e Tamam" Shari'ati goes to define Shi'ism as an ideal and perfect party:

"Shi'ism is a perfect party (hezb-e tamam). It is a party which on the one hand, represents the genuine principles and values of Abrahamic religion (din-e Ibrahimi), and on the other hand, it is an ideal response for an intellectual (roushanfokr) to realize his responsibilities in leading the society."

In short, Shi'ism is the manifestation of Islam 'in the form of a party which possesses a particular world-view, ideological structure, aims and objectives, mission and responsibility, philosophy and history, slogan, direction, political and social outlook, economic principles, leadership, tradition of struggle, organization and strategy. He further says; by party I mean an ideology and by describing Shi'ism as a party I mean the ideology of Islam in the form of a Shi'i philosophy (binesh-e tashayyu') which fulfills the need of all the intellectuals of the world. Its

90 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
members are the committed Shi'i people who are aware of their social responsibilities. They perceive Shi'ism as the more progressive wing of Islam and its philosophy as most human based on justice and freedom.  

According to 'Ali Shari'ati, Shi'ism put special emphasis on two principles: (i) 'adalat (justice) and (2) imamat (leadership). 'Adalat is described as the main objective of the mission of Shi'ism.  

He explains the concept of 'adalat in the light of the Qur'anic verses pointing out that in these

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91 Ibid., pp. 34-36.

92 For a detailed discussion on the concept of 'adalat by Ali Shari'ati, see ibid., vol. I, pp. 82-87 and pp. 92-120.

93 For example, 'Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong' and 'you are the best of peoples evolved for mankind enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil and believing in God' (Qur'an, 3:104 and 110).
versus the Islamic ummat or the Shi'a Party (hezb-e Shi'a) is described as the responsible group of people (geroh-e motahed) who fight against monkar (mobarez-e alayhe monkar). According to him amr bi'l-ma'aruf wa'l-nahi 'an'il-munkar (Enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong) means responsibility towards the whole mankind (mas'uliyat-e jahani).[^95]


[^95]: Ibid., p. 71.