

Preface

The political biography of Ali Shari'ati, considered by many as the ideological father of the Iranian revolution of 1979, is not only an account of one person's life but of the cultural, social and political conditions that reared him. Ali Shari'ati's life spans the highly sensitive period of change during which a conscious effort was made by the Pahlavi dynasty to push Iran from its presumed traditional status towards a Western-defined state of modernity. A product of the transformation initiated by Reza Shah, during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, Ali Shari'ati became actively involved in, and was greatly influenced by, the multifarious changes that Iranian society underwent in terms of economics, politics, ethics, culture, poetry, prose, film, journalism and even religion. A synthesis of many contradictory currents, Shari'ati became an instrumental figure in the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty. In this respect, his life reflects the convulsions of a culturally rich and historically ancient society confronted with the tides of changing times.

A society in a state of flux witnesses new alignments. Ideas and positions become polarized and those convinced of the absolute truth of their own are at a disadvantage when it comes to synthesis. Those in favour of an ideal modernity at all costs become as inflexible in their assessment of what is and what ought to be as those who cling to a traditional religion as their last defence in the face of pressing necessities. True believers, fixed in their ways, they never question. For Iranians, the genuine need for modernity and the struggle to protect Islam became a contradictory dilemma. Modernity was westward-looking, change-oriented and anti-traditional, while Islam was the formal cornerstone of society's established traditional values, a deeply-valued reliable cultural heritage. For a majority of intellectuals, Islam and modernity presented a trade-off. The choice of a path to modernity – economic, political and ideological – posed itself only after modernity was pursued at the cost of religion. This clash of powerful contradictory ideas left a few intellectuals – a third group who sought a union of opposites – in a limbo of uncertainty. Ali Shari'ati was of this group.

In his youth, and later in his active life, Shari'ati's praxis was the testing ground of his beliefs. Even though his vision of the ideal society was formed relatively

early in his life, the method and approach of attaining that ideal underwent considerable transformation. Over the years Shari'ati came to believe in – and in turn to reject – just about every way of political struggle available to the activist. Trial and error proved that certain modes of political action thought to be impossible in a particular socio-political environment could prove to be viable and effective under special circumstances. In these particular circumstances, never clearly discernable in advance, truisms in social sciences are there to be refuted. Who would have thought that open political agitation in speeches, articles and books would be permitted or neglected in a state which could not tolerate the least criticism?

To understand Shari'ati the man, one has to understand the spirit and customs of his time and place. In his society chivalry, honour and sacrifice were virtues. Sacrifice in the pursuit of honour incurs pain. The pleasure of pain and longing becomes the motor of life. In this society worthy men are those who have a pain, who live with it and never directly divulge it. It is the inward and outward scars that make a man. The hedonistic happy-go-luckys are boys who need to mature. In this tradition, romantic youth fall in love not to consummate their love, but to cherish the longing and the pain. This is the Oriental conception of a Platonic love. The creativity and originality that the pain causes pours itself into the poems, prose and sketches that young men such as Shari'ati produced. Shari'ati's poetry, romantic, political, or self-destructive, recounted the story of a pain. His sentimental romantic stories and his visionary Sufi words of ecstasy, were all narratives of longing and the heart-warming feeling of unfulfilled metaphysical love. Revolutionaries of all kinds; practitioners, intellectuals or preachers, are lovers of utopias and display all symptoms of an earthly lover at a metaphysical level. This is why Shari'ati always thought that even Marxist revolutionaries willing to die for a cause, were metaphysical idealists who were willing to sacrifice their most precious material belonging for an ideal cause.

The trajectory of Shari'ati's life resembles that of a generation of provincial young men who, by chance or divine providence, were sent to Europe on government scholarships. In Shari'ati's case, the cultural experience added to his other contradictory currents. Yet Shari'ati's curiosity allowed him to absorb all that went on around him in Europe. He observed and learnt, without losing sight of his objective – the synthesis of modernity and religion as the solution to the problems of his country. His skepticism and uncertainty bred a bold inquisitiveness. His receptivity to new ideas allowed him to articulate a new language. Shari'ati's words and concepts, which later impregnated minds and moved crowds, were nothing but the readily comprehensible synthesis of the many everyday theories and debates that he had heard. His patched-up doctrine was a redefined amalgam of different paradigms. Yet his language and his paradigm penetrated the minds and hearts of his audience. Shari'ati always spoke of the pain – his own – that he had to cry out. His mesmerizing political speeches were an echo of a political, economic and religious system that pained him.

When I began my research for this book I had no predisposition, value-judge-

ment or bias concerning Shari'ati. Convinced of his impact on the young and of his subsequent intellectual influence on the turn of events in Iran, I simply wished to understand the man and his life. The more I learnt about him, the more I was intrigued by his complexity and the aura of enigma surrounding him. I am neither judge nor prosecutor and certainly not the jury. I have tried to reconstruct a life on the basis of the information I have obtained. Wherever possible this has been double-checked. Where controversial episodes are discussed, opposing views have been presented. So far as the use of information available to me is concerned, as an Iranian I am still proudly bound by certain invisible cultural covenants. Cheap journalistic scoops cannot make up for low quality intellectual products.

In the process of my research in Iran, I came across a young, heavily bearded book-seller who, after testing my intentions, not only found me a three-volume rare collection written by one of Shari'ati's clerical detractors, but even offered to introduce me to the author. Before handing me the books, he said, 'So much is being said about Shari'ati, yet I have never honestly understood this man. Was he a saint or the devil himself? If you shed some light on him, I would receive my real recompense (*ajr*).' I promised to do my best.

Introduction

Shari'ati: Dated or Still Inspiring?

'It is not about reaching somewhere but moving in a direction'
(C.W. 16, p. 34).

Ali Shari'ati Mazinani wrote and lectured prolifically between 1966 and 1976. His words, ideas and constructions were different from those that permeated the Iranian intellectual scene at the time. He was a heterodox Shi'i intellectual, whose reliance on religion alienated the left intellectuals while his use of western concepts displeased the religious establishment. The way he bridged western modern thought, its left variant in particular, with a new provocative reading of Islam, did undoubtedly appeal to a wide spectrum of the Iranian youth. Shari'ati was an oddity, who wrote poetically, engaged creatively in spatial, ideational and temporal associations, spoke grippingly and got under people's skin. Seldom would he be ignored. He died in 1977. When the revolution got under way, succeeded and then consolidated itself, the wide array of his ideas were taken in and out of context, made into eternal truths and treated as oracles by some, thrashed, damned and banned by others. Shari'ati came to mean different things to different people in the thick of the revolution and its aftermath. The main body of this book, the story of his life, was written between 1992 and 1997, some 20 years after his death. Now, decades after his death and on the occasion of another edition of his biography, the standard question poses itself. Are Shari'ati's ideas dated? Should an obituary be written for the relevance of his works to our conditions and predicaments today? Did his works ever contain any essential ideas that would endure through time, revealing something new to every generation reading his works? Irrespective of his most interesting life, is there anything salvageable and pertinent in the ideas of this iconoclastic icon of his time?

Shari'ati differentiated between an intellectual and a scientist or thinker. For him, the intellectual was not only a learned person with path-breaking ideas capable of understanding the social problems of his people. He or she was also charged with generating self-awareness, a goal and a common ideal among the people, thereby creating a movement.¹ Shari'ati did not believe in a universally fixed or single prototype of the intellectual, but in geographically specific

1. Shari'ati. Collected Works (C.W) 20, p. 262

intellectuals who could be considered as such in particular localities, with particular socio-economic levels of development and cultural specificities.² Considering action and the creation of a movement as part and parcel of the definition of the intellectual's task, Shari'ati maintained that there could be no absolute intellectual aware of the problems and cultures of all societies and so he would probably not have thought of his works as qualifying for the list of western 'Great Books'.

Shari'ati was called the ideologue of the Iranian Revolution because after his death, when the revolution happened, it was his thoughts on a new revolutionary Islam that politicized many among the educated. The revolution and the revolutionaries were only interested in Shari'ati's insurrectionary political discourse and his Islamic ideology couched in terms of absolute perfections. The euphoria of the revolution blinded the revolutionaries to Shari'ati's important reflective moments when he took stock of the echo of his teachings. These were his intellectually courageous moments of aggressive self-questioning filled with 'what ifs', 'buts', 'whys', and painful doubts, causing another cycle of attenuated and refined propositions and ideas. As Shari'ati's 'neverthelesses' and 'howevers' were drowned in revolutionary certitude, his Islamic ideology attained a static, fixed and absolute aspect representing the essence of his intellectual contribution, if not his only achievement. The popularity of his revolutionary ideology, which turned out to be so timely and relevant, veiled the subtleties and nuances of his methodology that undermined the certitudes and finiteness of any ideology. From Shari'ati's life-long vacillations between scepticism and certitude, the certitude befitting an ideologist and a revolutionary was accentuated while his scepticism and doubt, the mother of his long-lasting contributions, was brushed over. Only a close reading of Shari'ati's intellectual life can demonstrate that Shari'ati's Islamic ideology as a project was neither the only nor the final product of his life. Shari'ati's methodology contains the principal elements undoing and dismantling the rigidity of his ideology, rendering it an open-ended project. Had his death, which silenced him, and the Iranian revolution, which eternalized his ideological contribution from which different groups deduced different courses of action and systems of governance not occurred, Shari'ati's methodology would have certainly outlived his ideology. This may still happen if the constituent elements of his methodology are delineated and explained.

Today, the youth that Shari'ati touched and influenced in the Iran of the mid 1960s to mid 1970s are senior citizens and their children and grandchildren are living in a different time, intellectual space and material world. They do not breathe in what Shari'ati identified as an intellectual and cultural environment dominated by the triangle of 'socialism, existentialism and gnosticism'.³ Social, political, economic and cultural realities have changed and so, accordingly, have the global influential factors calibrating this generation's perceptions and ideals.

2. *Ibid.* 20, pp. 262-3

3. *Ibid.* 16, p. 80

Shari'ati's need to ideologize Islam in order to change Iranian society may have made sense in the age of ideologies, but may now look suspect to those who lived through the crises and fall of western ideologies, witnessed the intellectual criticism and debunking of ideologies and ideological thinking and experienced the practice of an Islamic ideology since the late 1970s.⁴ In the course of formulating his ideology, Shari'ati's thought process generated concepts and ideas of enduring significance and relevance. His controversial claim that Islam is heterogeneous and that there has been competition, contradiction and struggle between many islams throughout history, based on varying social, political and economic outlooks, is as relevant today as it was 50 years ago. Shari'ati maintained that within all Abrahamic faiths, one type of discourse of Judaism, Christianity and Islam has been historically opposed to progress, freedom and liberty while another has been its ally and promoter. Challenging homogenization, Shari'ati claimed that the anti-progress religious discourse, which was correctly labelled as the opium of the masses, was the religion of polytheism and infidelity. This religious discourse, he argued, had been historically at war with the progressive faith, the true monotheistic faith and the harbinger of consciousness, contestation and change.⁵ Highlighting the struggle within Islam, Shi'ism and its spokesmen and custodians, Shari'ati challenged the monolithic concept of religion, pitting what he coined as the progressive and just Sunnism of Mohammad and its twin concept, the Shi'ism of Ali, against the reactionary and unjust Sunnism of the Umayyids and its twin concept the Shi'ism of the Safavids.⁶

Long before the terms fundamentalism and Islamism crafted a false and homogeneous perception of Islam, Shari'ati demonstrated that Islam had different faces, projects and relationships in regards to the status quo. Shari'ati's emphasis on the importance of understanding one's time and place and the pressing needs of a particular society and generation, ironically renders his Islamic ideology crafted in the early 1970s dated. Yet his method of starting with the persisting realities, problems and needs of here and now remains relevant. The fact that Shari'ati's ideology, symbols, references, heroes and anti-heroes may not resonate with today's Iranian youth becomes less important in terms of assessing his relevance, if his method enables every generation to re-formulate a new set of ideas, paths, objectives and role models to attain what he considered as humankind's eternal yearning for freedom, social justice and equity. In what follows, the salient features of Shari'ati's method, revolving around his concept of becoming, will be discussed to demonstrate that Shari'ati's system of reflection renders his ideas, even his ideology, immune to petrification, dogmatism and intolerance.

4. *Ibid.* 16, p. 71; *Ibid.* 23, p. 180

5. *Ibid.* 22, pp. 6-23

6. *Ibid.* 9, pp. 78, 87

Becoming: An Open-Ended Humankind

One of Shari'ati's key starting points in the formulation of his thoughts is understanding and defining humankind (*ensan*) before conceptualizing an ideology for it. Since his ideology is a function of correctly identifying the target humans for whom he wishes to construct an ideal goal and objective, how he views humankind in a particular time period, and which high ideals he attributes to them, become important factors. On the identification of the ideal individual, state and society, or the objectives that ought to be attained, Shari'ati does not waiver much. But on the degree to which actually existing realities need to be taken into consideration in properly identifying the road-map to the ideal objectives, he vacillates between two methods.

His two methods reflect two different approaches to the importance of humankind's state of being and evolution in relation to attaining the ideals, assuming that those ideals remain fixed. Assuming that ideology deals with what ought to be and how to attain it, then the success or failure of attaining those objectives would also depend on an assessment of humankind's existing state of being, at the time when those objectives were being sought. With changing times a re-appraisal of existing realities may require re-adjusting short-term objectives, which may impact the attainment of ideals as they were initially articulated. Furthermore, as humankind evolves it is possible that it may re-define its ideals.

Shari'ati's Islamic ideology contained what he believed to be certain timeless and perpetually relevant values such as monotheism, freedom, social justice and equity, which he argued were eternally in tune with the essence of human nature. When Shari'ati claimed that ideology was nothing but 'the continuation of instinct in humankind', he was suggesting that struggling against unfairness, inequality and injustice; which to him at the time were represented by political oppression, economic exploitation and religious deception, was an eternal aspect of human nature.⁷ Shari'ati's Islamic ideology remained equivocal on specific issues such as individual freedoms, human rights, civil rights, women's rights, civil society, democratic rule, political checks and balances and good government. Shari'ati, however, insisted that an ideology based on general laws and fixed human ideals could not become concerned with specifics and details since, if it were to, it would cease to be an ideology and would become a manual or a handbook.⁸

The first phase of constructing an ideology according to Shari'ati required knowledge of prevailing realities and the second phase required the creation of values and identification of responsibilities.⁹ According to him, religion as an ideology was a consciously chosen belief based on 'existing and actual needs and aberrations' with the objective of realizing the ideals.¹⁰ Shari'ati magnified the

7. *Ibid.* 23, p. 127

8. *Ibid.* 23, p. 110

9. *Ibid.* 20, p. 484

10. *Ibid.* 23, p. 78

importance of considering the prevailing conditions in the process of constructing an ideology, by insisting that 'ideology is never separated from humankind and from a generation in a particular age'.¹¹ He even assigned the responsibility of coordinating the general laws and fixed human ideals with actually existing conditions to the intellectuals of the time.¹² This task of coordinating general human ideals and the prevailing mental and material condition of the people is left to the intellectual, the new messengers of change, supposedly because they are knowledgeable of the conditions on the ground. This perception of an ideology's architecture renders it transient and subject to alterations as socio-political, economic and psychological conditions change with time.

Yet elsewhere Shari'ati maintained that it would be opportunistic and incorrect to argue that 'an ideology which was just, right and correct (*haq*) at one point in time needed to be put aside since times had changed' and that another ideology 'in tune with the present time needed to be adopted'.¹³ An ideology, he added was judged on the basis of its veracity or falsity, not on its age.¹⁴ Passing of time, Shari'ati insisted, could not mitigate these key universal values of an ideology such as social justice and equality. Therefore, his observations on ideology lend themselves to at least three readings. First, an ideology with fixed ends and means applicable to all times, ages and places. Second, ideology as a project with fixed lofty ideals and flexible means of attaining those ends. Third, a transient and open-ended ideology, mindful of changing times and aware of the need to incorporate the newly emerging conditions and problems leading to a reassessment of the path to the ideal objective, if not a reassessment of that ideal.

A key element in Shari'ati's understanding of humankind and its evolution through time, weighs in favour of the second and third reading, thereby making his method of ideological construction relevant to all times. Humankind, he insisted is 'a constellation of different capabilities in the process of becoming' and has not yet 'become a creature' as it is 'becoming'.¹⁵ According to this position the creation process of humankind is an on-going one and therefore its countenance and state remains unfinished. Humankind is therefore constantly evolving, making it impossible to define a final mental and material state, on which to base or formulate an ideology. According to Shari'ati, humankind's evolving state of becoming, which he called 'devenir' (*shodan*) is conditioned and propelled by its only two constituent and contradictory forces; mud and the spirit of God.¹⁶ God created humankind from mud and blew His spirit into it.¹⁷ Mud is its origin and God, its potential destination. To Shari'ati humankind on earth is god-like in exile, with three faces: love (Eve), reason (Satan) and

11. *Ibid.* 23, p. 119

12. *Ibid.* 23, p. 111

13. *Ibid.* 23, p. 105-106

14. *Ibid.* 23, p. 112

15. *Ibid.* 14, p. 301

16. *Ibid.* 14, p. 195

17. *Ibid.* 14, p. 124

rebelliousness (the forbidden fruit).¹⁸ Shari'ati affirmed that humankind was nothing but 'a choice, a jihad, a struggle and a becoming'.¹⁹

At any point in time, humankind finds itself between two points on a continuum, hypothetically capable of ending up in a state characterized by its lower origin or higher destination. The rules governing humankind's activities on earth are dialectical ones and so it is assigned to create a paradise in its exile on earth and struggle to 'attain God's attributes'.²⁰ According to Shari'ati, the history of humankind, or 'the story of becoming', is not accidental: it must have started from somewhere and should be going somewhere.²¹ Humankind, as well as its history, has its origin in contradiction. Shari'ati sees becoming as an outcome of dialectical contradictions. For him dialectics is the method of analysis closest to Islamic reasoning and one of the greatest divine traditions prevailing over both cosmic and social systems.²² Contradiction, he writes, is a method and 'Islam begins everything - existence and humankind - with contradiction'.²³ So for the individual for whom Shari'ati is seeking to construct an ideology, nothing is final and all is in transition until he or she attains God's attributes, ascending from the lowest to the highest form.

Thus Shari'ati arrives at another controversial conclusion, based on his premise that 'the creation of humankind is not finished'.²⁴ He insinuates that the final stage of the ongoing process of creation will occur here on earth through humankind, the god-like, who is endowed by God with three of His salient features: consciousness (*agahi*), freedom (*azadi*) and creativity (*afarinandegi*).²⁵ Shari'ati consciously hammers at the Islamically controversial notion that humankind is god-like and argues against any theoretical incompatibility between Islam and humanism.²⁶ The Qur'an's account of creation, Shari'ati maintained, is the most progressive account of humanism.²⁷ Shari'ati's method of viewing humankind as a perpetual process of creation, a timeless and ever-relevant concept, contradicts the petrified single ideal, single path which may be attributed to him.

Becoming: An Inclusive Ideology

Contrary to those Islamic thinkers who favoured a break with modern civilization, believing that ideas borrowed from non-Islamic sources presaged a new age of ignorance (*jahiliyya*), Shari'ati believed in the incorporation of all

18. *Ibid.* 16, p. 50

19. *Ibid.* 14, p. 195

20. *Ibid.* 16, p. 50

21. *Ibid.* 16, p. 51

22. *Ibid.* 18, pp. 137-138

23. *Ibid.* 23, p. 187; *Ibid.* 18, p. 138

24. *Ibid.* 14, p. 301

25. *Ibid.* 14, pp. 297-300; *Ibid.* 22, p. 10

26. *Ibid.* 20, p. 165

27. *Ibid.* 16, p. 41

ideas which constituted a part of humanity's heritage. Seyyed Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood's influential theorist and a contemporary of Shari'ati, believed that only the destruction of the kingdom of man could usher in the kingdom of God, since he believed man to be a usurper. Shari'ati, on the other hand, saw man as a god-like being empowered by God to complete creation on earth. Shari'ati did not see a conspiracy of the Judeo-Christian world against Islam. He considered the monotheist Judeo-Christians, who struggled against oppression, exploitation and deceit as comrades-in-arms, true children of Abraham. Whereas Qutb, in line with the ancient Greeks, saw rivalry and animosity between God/gods and humankind, Shari'ati saw cooperation and love between God and his creatures. Shari'ati's God was neither jealous nor discriminatory but compassionate and enabling. Qutb came to represent the inward-looking, exclusivist vision of Islam, while Shari'ati came to represent the all-embracing inclusivist school. Shari'ati declared that, contrary to those who rejected following the West, he believed that ignoring the 'modern world and civilization' would be 'an invitation to reaction and regression'.²⁸ He posited that following and learning from the West on how they had succeeded was similar to the relations between a student and a teacher, which he categorized as 'logical and progressive'.²⁹ This did not prevent him from otherwise sharply criticizing the West.

Reflecting on the determining factors causing social change, Shari'ati expounded various theories and concluded that it would be impossible to identify one key factor triggering social change in different systems. Shari'ati ruled that the ideologies and schools of thought, which identified one single causal factor, such as self-awareness, geography, science, social relations or forces of production as the determining element, were misguided.³⁰ His solution was to consider all casual factors as partially explanatory of social change at a particular stage and in a certain type of society, leading him to call for their inclusion in a system of reflection. Contrary to Seyyed Qutb, the purist, Shari'ati the pluralist believed in the incorporation of, 'all those contradictory factors'.³¹

Shari'ati was committed to the conceptualization of a Shi'i ideology, which took note of, and sought to surpass Marxism, humanism and existentialism, as he believed that an Islamic world outlook which ignored the main currents of 20th century thought would be condemned to disappearance.³² Shari'ati was an innovator who sought to learn from other ideologies and argued that whatever constituted a part of human civilization's heritage could help the perfection of an ideology.³³ He subsequently incorporated into his Islamic ideology western ideas alien and even heretical to traditional Islam such as Marxism, humanism and existentialism. Shari'ati spoke of first adopting these three western schools of

28. *Ibid.* 20, p. 115

29. *Ibid.* 20, p. 116

30. *Ibid.* 18, p. 150

31. *Ibid.* 18, p. 150

thought and then releasing them in order to arrive at Islam.³⁴ We need to obtain these modern and progressive ideologies, he believed, learn from them and then abandon them to arrive at a correct Islamic ideology. According to Shari'ati, the adoption of such a method would render the Shi'i ideology he was constructing superior to Marxism, humanism and existentialism.³⁵

Shari'ati defended the inclusivist and eclectic methodology he employed by explaining why the Islamic ideology could 'benefit' from other ideologies. Capitalism he argued was the key concern of the times and both Islam and Marxism were in competition with one another over their radical and fundamental opposition to it.³⁶ Marxism, he admitted, was clearer and more precise in its criticism of capitalism, since it emerged in the process of struggling against capitalism, while Islam was formed in the process of struggling against any condition which kept humankind enfeebled, dominated and subjugated (*esteza'af*), through colonization, oppression, exploitation or deception.³⁷ Therefore, Shari'ati ruled that Marxism should be used and reminded his potential detractors that such a choice distinguished a frozen and static ideology from a dynamic one.³⁸ Shari'ati's method provided the framework in which he could argue that Islam could seek assistance and benefit from 'the revolutionary experiences of other peoples and doctrines' on the way to attaining the self-defined objectives of its own ideology.³⁹ As long as the ideas adopted from others do not contradict the objectives of the Islamic ideology he was constructing, Shari'ati embraced the other.

Shari'ati's method was unique among Muslim thinkers who believed in politicizing Islam, except for perhaps Mehdi Bazargan and Mahmoud Taleqani's approaches. His method, not adverse to eclecticism, allowed for the construction of an Islamic ideology which was by definition not only pluralist, varied and diverse, but most importantly, open-ended and unfinished. Shari'ati was engaging in a particular process of adopting diverse non-Islamic ideas, preserving aspects of them, while abolishing or abandoning them and then proposing a transcendent synthesis, the Shi'i ideology, which he believed would be more complete and perfect. Preserve, change and supersede, is Hegel's *Aufhebung* and Shari'ati's becoming. Shari'ati employs this method not only in the construction of his ideology, but incorporates it in his view of a humankind assigned by God to seek perfection, moving from mud to God-like.

Becoming: If Indetermination, then Endless Human Free Will

At times Shari'ati employed a concept called 'indetermination' in his analysis. He even attributed the authorship of a book called 'The Principle of Indetermination

34. *Ibid.* 18, p. 223

35. *Ibid.* 18, pp. 222-223

36. *Ibid.* 23, p. 114

37. *Ibid.* 23, p. 115; *Ibid.* 20, p. 249

38. *Ibid.*

in Life' to Professor Chandel, who was Shari'ati's fictional creation and stand-in.⁴⁰ In his writings, Chandel is Shari'ati's assumed name by which he could go incognito. The attribution of a book on indeterminism to Chandel implies that the concept was dear to Shari'ati and that he identified with its explanatory powers. Shari'ati considered the principle of indeterminism to be the negation of scientific certitude.⁴¹ For Shari'ati, indeterminism was a theoretical construct undermining all dogmas, things immutable and rigid, leading him to claim that indeterminism rendered 'the truth about the universe' incomprehensible.⁴²

For Shari'ati, the believer-sceptic, the concept of indeterminism provided one principal argument and a subsidiary one undermining dogmas and certitudes. By relying upon indeterminism Shari'ati seemed to repudiate any type of categorical or scientific conclusions and theories, especially in the realms of social organization, social relation and arguably history. Rejecting the primacy of fatalism and predetermination in the outcome of human conditions allowed him to highlight the role of free will in the process of becoming.⁴³ If nothing was pre-determined, free will imposed the necessity of choosing on a 'hesitant', yet 'responsible' human being.⁴⁴ Shari'ati's principle of indeterminism was part and parcel of his understanding of humankind, its evolution and history as unfinished. He was adamant that humankind was evolving and in motion, and that its potential for ascension (*me'raj*) was boundless.⁴⁵ Explaining the impossibility of conceiving and applying inert 'standards' to humankind's evolutionary journey, Shari'ati emphasized that humankind was a 'choice', an 'eternal becoming'.⁴⁶ Here too, he employed an open-ended method, in contradiction with any ideologization or theoretical prescription, thus potentially useable by any generation at any time. Can, however, an eternal state of choice determining a never-ending state of becoming become encapsulated in a bounded ideology?

The subsidiary use of the principle of indeterminism for Shari'ati was that through it, he could call for greater tolerance by shedding doubt on the absolute truth of ideas. According to Shari'ati the distinctive feature of an intellectually progressive and open individual or society was its ability to tolerate opposing ideas.⁴⁷ The claim to having unassailable and consistently correct ideas, Shari'ati maintained, was reserved for the Prophet.⁴⁸ He held that ordinary humans,

40. *Ibid.* 20, pp. 142-3

41. *Ibid.* 18, p. 136

42. *Ibid.* 18, p. 137

43. *Ibid.* 18, p. 102-104

44. *Ibid.* 16, pp. 44-45. On Shari'ati's concept of hesitation also see: *Ibid.* 33, vol.2, pp. 739, 746-753

45. *Ibid.* 16, pp. 44-45

46. *Ibid.* 16, p. 47

47. *Ibid.* 17, p. 206

therefore, would have to admit to a margin of error in their ideas and understandings.⁴⁹

Becoming: Movement and Revolt

If humankind endowed with free will is in perpetual movement towards a particular direction, then the extent to which it attains self and social consciousness should determine its pace of advancement towards becoming god-like. The social conditions conducive to the attainment of self and social consciousness, according to Shari'ati, required the existence of different schools of thought and the freedom to debate, disagree and even to 'argue against God, Islam and the Qur'an'.⁵⁰ For Shari'ati an imposed uniformity of thought, exercised by religio-political authority, was detrimental to the evolution of ideas and consciousness.⁵¹ When 'movement' generated by the 'clash of ideas and thoughts' gives way to 'institutions', 'organizations' and 'administrative systems' issuing decrees on what is to be done and how to think, inertia sets in, uniformity prevails and humankind's ascension is arrested.⁵² Institutionalization of all faiths, proselytization and the rise to political power of their custodians and representatives was, according to Shari'ati, at the origin of long-lasting and paralyzing polytheistic faiths masquerading as monotheism.⁵³

Shari'ati deemed the institutionalization of a faith as the end of its dynamic phase and the beginning of its conservative and subsequently reactionary phase at odds with any attempt at change.⁵⁴ Shari'ati's method is adverse not only to institutionalization but also to the formation of any system or order, as he saw centralization and homogenization as inevitable consequences of systematization, leading to the imposition of an unquestioning hegemonic perception on all. In his search for an antidote to the tendency of movements to give way to institutions, Shari'ati evoked the concept of 'permanent revolution'.⁵⁵ Emphasizing permanent movement and shunning inertia in the personal, social and political realm, 'ascending and becoming', were echoed in another concept often employed in Shari'ati's works.

He adopted Camus' saying: 'I revolt and protest, therefore I am' as his motto.⁵⁶ Humankind's state of revolt and defiance, and its voluntarism, were the motor of Shari'ati's *Aufhebung*, the movement towards perfection. Free will and the penchant to ascend, he believed, would induce humankind to revolt, a revolt, which would start against God and would culminate in God. In Shari'ati's

49. *Ibid.* 17, p. 308

50. *Ibid.* 30, p. 61

51. *Ibid.* 14, p. 231

52. *Ibid.* 14, pp. 230-232

53. *Ibid.* 14, p. 320

54. *Ibid.* 20, p. 398

55. *Ibid.* 20, p. 398; *Ibid.* 35, vol.1, p. 221

56. *Ibid.* 16, pp. 180-181

construction, protesting and revolting became an inbuilt anti-thesis, constantly interacting with the thesis, at whatever point on the continuum of becoming, thus pushing the process forward. Revolting, for Shari'ati, was a statement of human consciousness, negation and creation.⁵⁷ Revolting against the status quo, inertness, oppression and injustice, became the identifiers of monotheistic faiths in their struggle against polytheistic faiths, the upholders of the existing order.⁵⁸

Shari'ati's never-ending dialectical process cannot theoretically conceive of a final synthesis that would avoid inertia until humankind arrives at its objective of becoming god-like. How can Shari'ati's open-ended method of permanent change, revolution, inclusion and ascension, all integral parts of the process of becoming, be reconciled with his straight-jacketed ideologization of Islam? Is it the old story of the free thinker becoming instantaneously enamoured with political action under certain political circumstances? The account of the intellectual donning the hat of the revolutionary, as did many before and after him, only to regret it later?

So, where do we stand in relation to Shari'ati today? His dynamic method, his reflective and indignant creativity in the realm of ideas, concepts and associations, his deep contempt for personal, social and political inertia, his scepticism and finally his religio-humanist contempt for political oppression, economic exploitation and religious deception will continue to resonate with the curious, the self and politically conscious, the heterodox and the critical believers. To some he might represent a thinker of a by-gone historical period of Iran that one can study and learn from. And to some, Shari'ati belongs to that list of past Iranian intellectuals and politicians, including Mosaddeq, who became popular for the 'wrong reasons', set the 'wrong standards' and propagated the 'wrong values'. Yet curiously enough there is something about Shari'ati which seems to resonate with generation after generation. His lofty and promising dreams presented in a passionate and gripping style inspire hope and give an inner voice to the mute, the neglected and the wretched of the earth. His poignant words weaving penetrating thoughts soothe and provoke his readers yearning for fairness, deliverance and a better world. Shari'ati is not a political theorist, activist, adviser or consultant. He is neither good at nor interested in details and specifics. He is a poetic and caring social critic preoccupied with God, life, human predicaments. Ali's Shi'ism and grand ideas conducive to alleviating the burdens and pains of humanity. Shari'ati remains a unique intellectual of interest. There is a magic to receiving great public attention despite being associated with a by-gone period and its ideas. Shari'ati possesses this magic. He goes on living through his works.

57. *Ibid.* 20, p. 193

58. *Ibid.*

Shari'ati's Audience and Discourse at the University of Mashhad

In the second half of the 1960s, politicised students at Iranian universities were deeply influenced by various shades of Leninism, Maoism and Castroism. After the inertia and political inactivity of the second National Front, Mosaddeqism as a liberating belief had lost its appeal. The Tudeh (communist) Party had also been discredited among the young. Even widely-praised and nationally-esteemed militant and anti-imperialist intellectuals such as Al-e Ahmad had come under attack from the revolutionary left. In a pamphlet entitled *Khashmegin az Imperialism Tarsan az Enqelab* ('Angry at Imperialism and Afraid of Revolution') written after Al-e Ahmad's death, Amir-Parviz Puyan categorized Al-e Ahmad as a petty bourgeois intellectual afraid of the socialist revolution.¹ Politically engaged students and intellectuals, therefore, gradually gravitated towards some type of revolutionary communism. It could be safely said that during these years a significant Islamically oriented political discourse or tendency was almost non-existent in the universities.

The great majority of Iranian students who constituted Shari'ati's audience fell into three categories, those for whom religion was a private and traditional affair, those who were insensitive to it and finally those who had come to oppose it. Even though a general anti-shah sentiment characterized the popular mood of the politicized university students at the time, they constituted a relatively small proportion of all students. A good number of students were too busy catching up with the Western-style mode of life and enjoyed the individual freedoms that the shah's regime had provided them. To this group, whose life-style was incompatible with traditional religious commitments and requirements, religious issues seemed retrograde and old-fashioned. To the hard-working and studious types who saw their university education as a key to a successful career and a passport to a brighter socio-economic situation, religion was at best a private affair. For such people, even if they were interested in political issues, active engagement in politics was either undesirable or too risky. For the relatively small group of politically active leftist students, religion was a metaphysical and idealist conception which was

philosophically outmoded and politically dangerous since it was believed to deter the masses from revolutionary action. In their eyes, it did not provide a tool for social transformation, but on the contrary was a barrier to change.

By 1970 the issue of armed struggle divided the political activists at Mashhad University. At this time, Shari'ati still believed that the subjective revolutionary conditions did not exist in Iran and was convinced of their determining role in the success of the revolutionary movement. He considered the education of the masses in the Islamic ideology as the key pre-requisite to a liberating revolution. The revolutionary Marxist-Leninists, however, believed in armed struggle, arguing that even if revolutionary conditions were absent, they would only come into being through action. One could learn about and prepare for the revolution by making revolution not by talking about it. The revolutionary Marxists accused Shari'ati and those who believed in talking about revolution before doing it of being 'petty bourgeois intellectuals' or spoilt and rotten intellectuals (*rowshanfekran-e gande damagh*).²

It was in such an environment that Shari'ati launched his ideas based on Islam as a change-oriented and revolutionary social force. While large numbers of the politically uninitiated and uncommitted were easily won over by Shari'ati's poetic eloquence, the Marxists were confronted with an ambiguous and enigmatic figure whose real arguments and motives they could not easily assess. He was too popular to ignore and too shrewd to be easily baited. Shari'ati made use of their intellectual tools. He employed some of their categories, expressions and concepts where it suited him. Yet he explained such concepts through a new reading and exegeses of Islam and the Qur'an. In his classes, Shari'ati defined the ideal Islamic society which the Prophet was to build as one which would be free from 'political despotism', 'capitalism and exploitation', 'the degenerated clerical institution of a reactionary religion' and 'the statesmen and nobles of the ruling class'.³

Shari'ati's discourse dealt with and attacked those very same historical phenomena, systems and institutions which the left singled out for discussion and criticism. Yet his explanations, justification and clarification of historical and social developments were couched in Islamic terms and based on Islamic sources. The appearance of an attractive rival voice which ultimately invited the young to religion was disquieting for the left, which viewed anything Islamic as change-resistant, superstitious and reactionary. When transcripts of Shari'ati's lectures during 1966-67 on the 'History of Iran from Islam to the Gaznavids'⁴ (later published as *Eslamshenasi*) were circulated his ideas gradually became available to the intellectual circles in Mashhad.

At this time, copies of Shari'ati's lecture notes even found their way to Tehran. Shams Al-e Ahmad who taught 'History of Religions' at the *Elm va Sana't* (Science and Industry) University recalls that it was through a print-out of 'Eslamshenasi' given to him by one of his students, that he first heard of Ali Shari'ati. In a candid and exceptionally honest tone, not common among renowned intellectuals of any nationality, he recalls that having read *Eslamshenasi* he became extremely jealous

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of Shari'ati and comforted himself by the thought that Shari'ati must have been a 'safety valve'. Shari'ati's audacity and courage, he said, humiliated him. Several years later when he met Shari'ati, he recounted these feelings and asked for pardon.⁵

Reaction to what was becoming 'the Shari'ati phenomenon' was neither always favourable nor predictable. From April 1969, Shari'ati came under a series of veiled attacks in the Mashhad weekly *Hirmand*. In a series of intelligently written symbolic and satirical articles interwoven with astute puns, entitled *Maqameh Hantiyeh*, Hassan Mohaddess, poked fun at Shari'ati. To Mashhad's intellectuals it was clear that the subject of Mohaddess' long caustic articles was Ali Shari'ati. In the first, Mohaddess ridiculed the cigarette smoking teacher, from whose mouth circles of smoke departed like missiles. This teacher, Mohaddess wrote, had become the defender of Islam at the Faculty of Literature, while in the tradition of Khayyam he drank wine in secret, licking the stains of Liquor and Cognac from his tie.⁶ In the second article, Mohaddess gave more precise clues about his victim and quipped that he did not have 'Ali's will to challenge corruption single-handedly nor was he Abu Zarr, putting to shame the powerful and the wealthy'.⁷ Throughout the rest of the five articles, Mohaddess accused Ali of idealism, demagoguery, false pretences, pretentiousness and selfishness. Attacking his spiritualism and religious idealism, Mohaddess concluded that those who seek the reason for the destitution of the impoverished in the skies are misguided.⁸

Eslamshenasi

At the University of Mashhad, Shari'ati was involved with preparing his lectures and writing on different subjects. Aside from his mystical pieces, his written work during this period ranged from pamphleteering to in-depth academic research. Shortly after the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, Shari'ati retaliated fiercely against Daryush Ashuri's article, 'Anti-Zionism and anti-Imperialism in the East', in which Ashuri attacked Iranian intellectuals for their lack of independent thought. Shari'ati's article was not, however, published at the time. In November 1967, he wrote an introduction to a book by the Egyptian writer Mohammad Mandour, which he had translated and commented on as his BA thesis. 'On the critique of literature' ('Dar naqd-e adab') was published in the Spring of 1968 and was reviewed by Reza Davari in *Naqd-e Ketab*. However, the work that became the subject of considerable controversy, and marked Shari'ati's real intellectual debut, was *Eslamshenasi*.

On 1 January 1969, Shari'ati's book *Eslamshenasi* (Islamology) was registered and obtained legal permission for sale. In a word to his readers, he explained that the book was essentially composed of his lectures at the Faculty of Literature in the academic year 1345–6 (1966–67). In the absence of assigned texts or articles with the aid of which Shari'ati's students could prepare for his exams, two of his students, Shoja'i and Mossadeq Rashti, taped and then transcribed his words.⁹

The fact that the 640 page book has over 400 foot-notes proves that it could not have simply been the unprocessed result of Shari'ati's lectures. He must have added his, at times, lengthy foot-notes to the transcribed text.

Eslamshenasi is one of the few, if not the only academically well-documented book written by Shari'ati and, as such, it reflected his concern, as a professor, with academic research.¹⁰ Shortly after *Eslamshenasi*, succumbing to the demand of his young and eager audience at different universities throughout Iran, and accepting every invitation – security forces permitting – to propagate his message, Shari'ati was forced to abandon academic research in favour of repackaging some of his ideas. Whilst at Mashhad, he was able to incorporate the research he did for his class lectures into his speeches. By December 1972, he was ridiculing those who prompted him to base his lectures and writings on research and a scientific approach. Defending himself, he compared his position to that of his life-long hero Abu Zarr. He argued that Abu Zarr's only response to Ka'b al-Ahbar's deceptive ruling on the extent of wealth in Islam was to strike him so hard on the head with the tibia of a camel that he started to bleed. Just as Abu Zarr had not engaged Ka'b al-Ahbar in a civilized debate, he too could not apply 'the scientific approach' in the face of the 'people's hunger and the pillage of capitalists.'¹¹ 'How can one be a scientific researcher in the midst of such commotion?' he wrote.¹² Looking at his writings in 1976, seven years after *Eslamshenasi*, one can find the same references and quotes he used in that book.

The first part of *Eslamshenasi*, 'What is Islam?', contained the germ of many of the ideas on which Shari'ati focused and elaborated at length later in his life. Some were concepts that he had already developed in his published and unpublished works. Shari'ati lashed out at Westernized or assimilated intellectuals, whom he accused of being entirely dependent on the intellectual production and criteria of Westerners. He invited all 'authentic intellectuals' to be original thinkers and not to parrot the West.¹³ Having ascertained that Iranian society was essentially religious, he did not wish to affront the nationalist sentiments of his audience and therefore argued that one learnt about 'the true spirit of Iran's history', through an understanding of Islam.¹⁴ Moving on to the clergy Shari'ati chided them, claiming that *Eslamshenasi* was 'the first step, in Persian, towards a scientific and analytical understanding of Islam.'¹⁵ In it he enumerated fourteen essential characteristics of 'original Islam', which he readily disassociated from actually existing Islam.¹⁶ To prove his point Shari'ati referred to one or a combination of the following sources: the Qur'an, the Tradition of the Prophet, that of the Shi'i imams and the accounts of the first four caliphs.

Eslamshenasi served a triple purpose. First, it was the presentation of a modern, egalitarian and democratic Islam as the ideal and original form of Islam. Second, the obstacles to the realization of the ideal Islam were identified. Thirdly it showed why it was incumbent upon Muslims, as true believers in the most fundamental aspect of their religion, namely monotheism (*towhid*), to challenge and overcome these obstacles.

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Shari'ati's first objective in *Eslamshenasi* was to obliterate the traditional charges of conservatism and anti-modernism against Islam by demonstrating that Islam was not only compatible with certain modern concepts and concerns, but that these concepts had for long constituted an integral component of Islam. Shari'ati's attempt at reconciling what he believed to be the estranged Iranian youth with Islam, later led to the estrangement of the religious establishment. Based on the Prophet's Tradition, he sought to prove that in Islam, reason and religion were one and the same. He argued that the Qur'an contained various notions of evolution and therefore, contrary to the view of the clergy, Darwin's concept was defensible from an Islamic perspective.¹⁷

At the political level, he argued that Islam was based on democracy, majority vote and majority rule. Shari'ati argued that the concept of *showra* as in the Qur'an was the equivalent of democratic rule and as such it constituted one of the socio-political bases of an Islamic society. The procedural medium for the attainment of such a democracy was *ijma'* (consensus), which he interpreted as the vote of the majority.¹⁸ Shari'ati sought to prove that Islam even allowed for the freedom of the minority to exercise their rights by referring to those who did not vote for Imam Ali as the fourth caliph and the fact that the Imam did not curtail their freedom once he acceded to power.¹⁹

On the issue of individual rights, Shari'ati argued that during the early years of Islam, freedom of thought and expression had been prevalent. Tenacity of thought (*ta'asob*), he argued, gradually became a characteristic of the Islamic societies of the 5th and 6th century (after the Prophet's Hejira) and was followed by repression and bloodletting.²⁰ In *Eslamshenasi*, Shari'ati took a position in favour of tolerance and against the tenacity of thought (*ta'asob*) which he associated with repression and bloodletting. In an unelaborated statement he attempted to prove that individual liberties were guaranteed in Islam. He quoted from Imam Ali: 'do not be the subject of another since God has freed (liberated) you.'²¹ Later, he redefined *ta'asob* as 'responsibility' and 'commitment' to certain lofty objectives and goals and hailed it as 'one of the most noble qualities of human beings.'²² Once he became involved with constructing an Islamic ideology, Shari'ati saw *ta'asob* as a necessary attribute for those who had adopted an ideology.²³

In accordance with the open-minded spirit of *Eslamshenasi*, Shari'ati tried to prove that even unbelievers have a place in an Islamic society. Naturalists such as Abol-A'la, he argued, lived among Muslims and debated with them.²⁴ Quoting the Qur'anic verse, 'There is no compulsion in religion', Shari'ati asserted that freedom of religion was a feature of Islam.²⁵ Furthermore, in a lengthy footnote referring to the free activities of non-Muslim and even anti-Islamic scientists, writers and poets, he sought to prove the existence and widespread practice of religious tolerance in Islamic societies.²⁶

Shari'ati argued that 'universal equality' was a 'natural and fundamental principle', governing all social and private aspects of Islamic life.²⁷ The Qur'anic concept of Man's common lineage indicated that all were created equal and none could

impose his will on another. The Islamic economy as an aspect of the Islamic system was subsequently based on equality of income, consumption and the use of public wealth.²⁸ On the controversial issue of the equality of men and women, he limited himself to saying 'they are of the same origin and kind'.²⁹ Later in the book, Shari'ati admitted that Islam did not believe in the equality (*mosavat*) of men and women, but wished to place each in their 'natural position'.³⁰

Shari'ati argued that according to the philosophy of Islam, Man was both free and constrained. He was capable of voluntarism and subjected to determinism.³¹ The deterministic framework is the general law governing the process of social and historical development, which in a Hegelian fashion, tends towards the progressive unfolding of the Absolute or ideal.³² Later, he called it 'the progression of history towards the awakening of God in Man'.³³ For Shari'ati, the dialectical transformation process held the key to social and historical development. He readily admitted that the dialectical method of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis explained the general tempo of historical development.³⁴ In this sense, he employed the Marxian scheme of historical stages. Yet instead of remaining within the Marxian framework, designating a particular class as the revolutionary force which would initiate social transformation, he named the people (*nas*) as the real force behind historical development.³⁵

The second objective of *Eslamshenasi* was to identify and expose those who contradicted the rule of God and obstructed the people's right to attain perfection. Here Shari'ati identified his targets of attack. He lashed out at all those who had monopolized economic, political and religious power, which Shari'ati claimed to be the common property of all mankind, bestowed upon them by God. He claimed that polytheism did not only refer to the formal rejection of God, but included cases in which individuals performed acts which were the monopoly of God, thus substituting themselves for Him. The cult of personality, character worship or any human relationship in which an individual was blindly subservient to another was idolatry in Shari'ati's eyes. He wrote, 'Anyone who imposes his will on the people and rules according to his own whim, has made a claim to being God and whoever accepts such a claim is a polytheist, since absolutist rule, will, power, dominance and ownership is only in God's monopoly'.³⁶ Even though Shari'ati did not attack the monarchy directly, his subtle and sometimes explicit references to absolutist rule were clear and direct. On the issue of the clergy, Shari'ati was much more direct. He said: 'If we praise a religious jurist and have genuine respect for him to the extent of accepting everything he says, and every judgement he makes and every order he gives and follow every one of his ideas, we would become a polytheist and I would call this follower a "religious idolater"'.³⁷ Shari'ati also argued that Islam did not allow for a centralized and institutionalized clerical organization mediating between God and Man since God's relation with Man was a direct one. He therefore maintained that institutionalized religion would ultimately lead to reaction and dogmatism, perpetrating 'religious and clerical despotism'.³⁸

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Shari'ati's third objective in *Eslamshenasi* was to prove why true Muslims should oppose polytheism as he had defined it. Having established the people as catalysts of change, Shari'ati, set out to shed the people's fear of challenging the unjust authorities. On the surface, Shari'ati made a rather naïve generalization by singling out the evil trinity of ignorance, fear and greed as the source of all deviations, sins, crimes, vileness, baseness, vice, and even underdevelopment.³⁹ The *movahhed* or the monotheistic individual, Shari'ati argued, was immune to the evil trinity. His behaviour was not governed by expediency, but by the awareness of the fact that only God was to be feared and respected unconditionally and all others were impotent before Him. Shari'ati endowed the *movahhed* with those characteristics that would make an ideal Islamic revolutionary. The *movahhed* was an 'independent, fearless, selfless, dependable and wantless' individual, who bowed to no other authority than God.⁴⁰ Later *movahhed*, the preacher, gave way to the revolutionary *mojahed*.

Shari'ati's seemingly naïve generalization, becomes a galvanizing political invitation to reject, resist and combat all sources of polytheistic power such as dictatorship, the capitalist system and the official clergy. Shari'ati also believed that Muslims were the only social agents who could rise to this historic and revolutionary occasion, since as monotheists, they could not tolerate polytheism. The polytheistic world outlook was based on contradictions. Later, using the same ideas, Shari'ati developed a world outlook based on monotheism. The 'monotheistic world outlook' (*jahanbini-ye towhidi*) became a powerful tool for action. Receiving inspiration and power only from God, the believer set out to eradicate all sources of false power. Shari'ati's 'monotheistic world outlook' was an open invitation to 'rebellion' against all false gods.⁴¹ As Shari'ati became more ideological, his tolerance began to wane.

In *Eslamshenasi*, Shari'ati presented an Islamic Weltanschauung in embryo. A world outlook, which seemed compatible with the needs of a twentieth century third world country seeking a humane and egalitarian path to development but inconsistent and contradictory since it blended religious idealism based on faith in God and revelation with materialism based on reason and scientific inquiry. Shari'ati's eclecticism, a heritage of the God-Worshipping Socialists, his style and his presentation of Islam in a contemporary light enchanted young non-partisan Muslims who had long awaited fresh ideas which they could proudly defend. These very same qualities, along with the reinterpretations and exegeses that seemed necessary to present a contemporaneous Islam, enraged both the official custodians of materialism and the religious establishment in Iran. To the Marxists, Shari'ati was Islamizing and distorting their ideas. To the religious establishment Shari'ati was liberalizing, democratizing and socializing their Islam, while intentionally disregarding the cleavage between Shi'ite and Sunni Islam.

Shortly after the publication of *Eslamshenasi*, on 8 May 1969, its first review appeared in *Hirmand*.⁴² In 'A word about *Eslamshenasi*', Hossein Razmjou extolled the book. He explained why it had attracted the attention of scholars and why it

enabled him to recognize Islam anew. Razmju, a classmate of Shari'ati's at Mashhad University, praised the splendour of Shari'ati's style and said that the book had moved and touched him. He wrote, 'In my opinion (an opinion shared by impartial authorities) not many books of equal strength, breadth of vision and excellence have ever been written on Islamology, the tradition of the Prophet and history of Islam. This is a an epic of great splendour and humanity.'⁴³ Razmju's verdict was shared by many who viewed *Eslamshenasi* as a manifesto for the enlightened contemporary Muslim. It was the long-awaited voice in a milieu which longed to retain its Islamic identity without the associated stigma of anachronism and staleness.

After the publication of *Eslamshenasi*, in March of 1969, Shari'ati wrote an introduction to a book on Hujr ibn-'Addi. Akbari-e Marznak, a student of Shari'ati's at the University of Mashhad recalls that on a snow-covered winter day when classes had been cancelled because of the heavy snow, he met Shari'ati on campus.⁴⁴ Interested in the life of Hujr ibn-'Addi, Marznak asked Shari'ati for references on Hujr's life. After learning that Marznak knew some Arabic, Shari'ati gave him a few references and from then on constantly enquired about Marznak's research on Hujr. Once Marznak's work on Hujr, which was primarily based on translations, was finished, he gave the text to Shari'ati and asked him to write an introduction to it. Shari'ati wrote a long introduction and gave the book to a publisher.

In his introduction, Shari'ati severely criticized the clergy on a number of issues. First, he held them responsible for the absence of educational texts on the life of Islamic luminaries. If the heroes of Islam, such as Ali and Hossein, were not really known by the people it was because the clergy believed that 'the love of Ali' and 'shedding tears for Hossein' was enough for them.⁴⁵ Second, Shari'ati argued that instead of shedding light on the ideas of such characters and treating the principles for which they struggled throughout history, the clergy dedicated their time to writings on trivial rituals or compiling the reports of imams. In his first scathing attack on the main pillars of traditional Shi'i scholarship, Shari'ati argued that what were considered as classical Shi'i references were of no use to the educated layperson and that such books should be 'kept out of their reach.'⁴⁶ Books such as Majlesi's magnum opus, *Bahar al-Anwar*, Shari'ati believed, 'caused great disasters' even in the hands of preachers.⁴⁷ Third, Shari'ati criticized the clergy for their inability to introduce lesser known Islamic figures who could become perfect role models for the young. Personalities like Abu Zarr, Salman, Ammar and Hujr were the true followers of Mohammad's struggle against idolatry, the nobility, despotism, ignorance and capitalism. According to Shari'ati, the struggle for justice, equality and people's rule, which was launched by Islam and constituted the objective of these men, was a cause which would continue to exist until the implementation of such ideals.

Politicizing Islam and lashing at those who had depoliticized it, Shari'ati reminded his readers that Hossein left his holy pilgrimage of *haj* unfinished to wage a holy war against those who had trampled upon true Islamic principles. Shari'ati

wrote, 'observing religious rites and rituals is useless when such rituals come to lose their meaning and spirit. Turning around the Ka'ba is of no use to an en-chained people.'⁴⁸ Instead of awakening the people and helping them free themselves from 'repression, lies, humility and bondage', Shari'ati wrote, the clergy have con-tributed 'nothing other than repetitive and identical *resaleh amalieh* [explanatory texts on religious rituals and practices] on the rites and rituals of *nejasat* (un-cleanliness), *taharat* (purity and cleanliness), *zebh-e shar'i* (beheading animals according to proper religious rites) and *shakiyat* (domains of doubt in religious propriety).'⁴⁹ As an intellectual, Shari'ati considered his own role as that of intro-ducing the lives and ideas of the heroes of Islam and thereby familiarizing the people with their own history, from which they could learn and in which they could take pride. Shari'ati's introduction to *Hujr* was, nevertheless, an open chal-lenge to the authority and position of the traditional clergy. The expected clerical backlash came on the heels of Shari'ati's remarks.

The Intellectual Left and Shari'ati

It did not take long for the left to respond to Shari'ati's *Eslamshenasi*. In the Spring of 1968, while *Eslamshenasi* was still in lecture-note form, Ali Akbar Akbari pub-lished an article in the monthly edition of *Hirmand*. The article must have come as a surprise since the journal's editor, Ne'mat Mirzazadeh, and Akbari were both close friends of Shari'ati's. Akbari had been a member of the God-Worshipping Socialists in his youth, later joined the Iranian Peoples Party and became a Marx-ist in 1961. He was an anti-Tudeh Marxist who never joined any particular Marxist party or group. The *Hirmand* article was followed up by a review article in the left literary magazine *Faslha-ye Sabz*,⁵⁰ and in 1969 by a book, with the somewhat ambiguous title of *An Analysis of Certain Social Problems (Barrasi-ye Chand Mas'aleh-e Ejtema'i)*.⁵¹ Evoking standard Marxist-Leninist arguments on the ori-gin of classes, class struggle, historical materialism, the superiority of higher stages to lower stages of social development, the development of imperialism, the deter-ministic role of productive forces in explaining socio-historical events and an attack on social-Darwinism, Akbari sought to expose Shari'ati's methodological and theo-retical shortcomings. To demonstrate the 'scientific' validity of his Marxist position, Akbari supported his arguments with references to Amir-Hossein Aryanpur's book *Zamineh-e Jame'ehshenasi*.⁵² In class, Shari'ati's Marxist and revolutionary detrac-tors based their arguments primarily on Akbari's critique. However, as firm believers in armed struggle and the vanguard theory of revolution they opposed Akbari's non-revolutionary and legal Marxism.⁵³

In his introduction, Akbari explains that he not only wishes to criticize Shari'ati's work but also to present an alternative view on social and philosophical topics. Akbari's book, however, is essentially a Marxist attempt at demonstrating that despite Shari'ati's radical assertions, his beliefs and theories are nothing but a re-

vamped version of old 'idealist' and 'reactionary' thoughts based on a 'metaphysical' method of analysis.⁵⁴ Akbari wishes to caution Shari'ati's disciples that their intellectual mentor is only a pretender whose path would neither lead to development nor to liberation. In a polemical tone Akbari maintains that:

Through the use of reactionary ideas, falsification of history, distortion of science, the falsification of the theories and ideas of others, Mr Shari'ati misleads his students and readers from a correct understanding and a scientific grasp of society, thereby increasingly assisting the forces of reaction and underdevelopment.⁵⁵

Akbari takes issue with Shari'ati on a number of points. First, he disagrees with Shari'ati's definition of class. According to Shari'ati social classes are either based on economic and material conditions of social life or on religious and popular beliefs.⁵⁶ Shari'ati makes a clear distinction between 'economic classes' and 'belief classes', acknowledging in a footnote that the concept of 'belief classes' is his original contribution.⁵⁷ He maintains that while in ancient societies classes were formed on the basis of beliefs, in recent epochs classes are essentially rooted in economic conditions.⁵⁸ Ignoring Shari'ati's distinction, Akbari rejects the notion of 'belief classes'. He invokes the Marxist argument that classes are the product of material or economic relations between individuals, whereas ideas and beliefs are ideological relations and are therefore simple emanations of the real material base. Akbari concludes that 'belief classes' are 'figments of Mr Shari'ati's imagination' and 'have no real foundations nor have they ever existed in any society at any time.'⁵⁹

Shari'ati develops his concept of 'belief classes' in order to explain the emergence of what he considers to be the clerical class. He maintains that this powerful class has existed throughout history because the masses believed that an intermediary was needed to define and overlook their relation with God. Shari'ati explains that the clerical class generates a centralized, hidebound, change-resistant and repressive 'clerical institution' (*sazeman-e rowhaniyat*) which could in turn lead to reaction and the emergence of 'religious and clerical despotism.'⁶⁰ He points out that Islam condemns the emergence of a 'religious aristocracy' and its corollary. By deliberately categorizing the clergy as a variant of an oppressive class, Shari'ati wants to prompt his intellectual audience to draw the conclusion that the relation between the clerical institution and the masses cannot be anything but antagonistic. Bound by his ideological discourse, Akbari is forced to reject Shari'ati's broad conclusion on the clergy, the clerical institution and the contradiction between the masses and the clerical class. He argues that only the landowning clergy can be categorized as feudal landlords and subsequently despotic and reactionary while the non-landowning clergy must be considered as anti-feudal, anti-despotic and progressive.⁶¹ Ironically the Marxist becomes the protector of the clergy and the Islamist their bitter foe.

Second, in the tradition of Kasravi, Shari'ati attempts to undermine the long-held Shi'ite notion of intercession (*shafa'at*). He argues that it is not mediation [of an imam] that will determine the felicity or damnation of individuals, but their

own acts and innate qualities.⁶² Oblivious to the real purpose of Shari'ati's argument which is to reject the clerically held notion of mediation, Akbari argues that human qualities are not innate but the result of the individual's social and class position. Going off on a tangent, Akbari enquires, how can such effects become the cause of felicity or damnation?⁶³

Third, Shari'ati accuses the civilized nations of colonization, exploitation, enslavement, deception, injustice, corruption, aggression and war.⁶⁴ Akbari criticizes Shari'ati for his inability to distinguish between the Western countries and the capitalist classes in these countries. The absence of class analysis, Akbari argues, would lead to 'outrageous and unpardonable errors.'⁶⁵ Akbari argues that Shari'ati uses every occasion to attack and criticize capitalism in an 'unscientific' manner. Through this type of analysis he argues that Shari'ati whips up hatred and repugnance towards capitalism among his readers.⁶⁶ According to Akbari, colonialism has long tried to present Iran as a capitalist society and has consequently tried to substitute the false struggle against capitalism for the real struggle against colonialism and reaction.⁶⁷ Akbari tries to demonstrate that Iran is still in the pre-capitalist stage of development and since capitalism is a superior historical stage compared to feudalism, he concludes that the growth and expansion of capitalism in Iran is progressive and desirable.⁶⁸ In a scathing attack on Shari'ati, Akbari calls him 'a supporter of the landlords', and 'reactionary'.⁶⁹ He writes:

You admire the past, you are regressive. You oppose industry and the growth of technology in Iran. You have no liking for the sciences and consider modern civilization to be corrupt. You have labelled modern Man as corrupt and murderous. You search for morals and ethics in the past and believe that modern civilization will eradicate morals, ethics and religion. You wish to delay the forward movement of our society as much as possible.⁷⁰

It is ironic that Shari'ati was also of the opinion that his leftist opponents were in league with feudal-lords. He lamented that in 'an underdeveloped eastern country' such as Iran, the left intellectuals directed the 'sharp edge of their struggle and criticism not against feudalism and the landlords (*khan*), but towards philosophical idealism and God.⁷¹

Finally in the last section of his book Akbari subjects Shari'ati to criticism, slander and ridicule. In a passing remark (in parenthesis) Shari'ati refers to a rather confused aggregation of historical stages of transformation as 'primitive stage, nomadic and pastoral stage, agricultural stage, civilized stage, feudalism, bourgeoisie.'⁷² Outraged by this erroneous presentation, Akbari accused Shari'ati of lacking in the most elementary and rudimentary knowledge of social problems.⁷³ In an emotional statement Akbari writes, 'Has anyone forced Mr Shari'ati to write on issues about which he does not know the first thing? Is he obliged to tire and poison the mind of readers with such pseudo-learned gibberish and rigmarole?'⁷⁴

The fact that Shari'ati used the language of the left in order to attract the young to a redefined Islam must have prompted Akbari to demonstrate the difference between Shari'ati's 'false radicalism and distorted Marxism' and the 'progressive

theory of scientific socialism'. It is also conceivable that, having read Shari'ati's *Eslamshenasi*, Akbari thought that Shari'ati's misrepresentation of Marxian ideas and analysis would confuse his readers, misguide them and thus prove harmful to the anti-shah movement. A more personal reason is also evoked which should be considered with caution. It is said that the 'Shari'ati phenomenon' at the University of Mashhad had started to bother Akbari.⁷⁵ In the course of a discussion between Shari'ati and Akbari at the university's cafeteria, Shari'ati is said to have reproached Akbari for his use of 'an official language', by which he meant the employment of the official Marxist language which was in vogue among sympathizers of the Tudeh party (which Akbari was not). Akbari, however, misunderstood the remark and was extremely offended. He had presumed that by 'an official language' Shari'ati had implied that Akbari was towing the 'government's line' and supporting the government's ideas and policy positions. Akbari had returned what he thought was an insult by enquiring whether he was using an 'official language' or Shari'ati?⁷⁶ The fact that this incident occurred before the appearance of Akbari's critique may indicate that it caused the article and ultimately his book.

In response, Shari'ati is said to have belittled Akbari's book by considering it a statement of personal animosity and even insinuating that it was the work of SAVAK.⁷⁷ Some of Shari'ati's students, however, remember that after the publication of Akbari's book, even in private circles, Shari'ati always spoke of him with respect.⁷⁸ In public Shari'ati never attacked Akbari on personal grounds. In the course of a lecture in 1972 when he was at the height of his popularity, Shari'ati differentiated between his ordinary detractors and Akbari. In his caustic style, Shari'ati referred to Akbari's book and said 'its author was a highly enlightened and intellectual friend' and added that 'of course his book does not represent his own personality and that his thoughts are far more valuable'.⁷⁹

The Revolutionary Left and Shari'ati

The revolutionary left's unofficial response to Shari'ati's lectures came in a letter from Amir-Parviz Puyan and Masud Ahmadzadeh in the autumn of 1968. Ne'mat Mirzazadeh was the courier between the old friends whose different ideologies had gradually estranged them. He recalls that having read the letter, Shari'ati had handed it over to him saying, 'see how this year's sparrows wish to teach those of last year'.⁸⁰ Shari'ati was referring to the fact that he was some thirteen years older than Puyan and Ahmadzadeh. The contents of the letter, which was written with a red ball-point pen and signed by both Puyan and Ahmadzadeh, included a number of objections to Shari'ati's ideas expressed in his classes and especially in *Eslamshenasi*.

First, they objected to the 'unscientific' and 'metaphysical' nature of Shari'ati's thought. In the Iranian political circles of the time, 'scientific theory' was the code word for socialism and 'metaphysical ideas' referred to religious or Islamic posi-

tions. In reality Shari'ati was being chided for presenting social problems through an Islamic rather than a purely Marxist–Leninist discourse. Second, they objected to Shari'ati's introduction of concepts and ideas that confused the youth in 'selecting the correct path to solving Iran's social problems'. In the letter, Shari'ati was accused of playing a deviant and schismatic role among the young. For Puyan and Ahmadzadeh, the assessment and critique of social problems from a religious perspective and the provision of 'progressive' solutions based on a particular Islamic interpretation was a deviant alternative to Marxism–Leninism. The fact that a Muslim could also lash out at capitalism and imperialism and call for a democratic and egalitarian society, threatened the Marxist–Leninist monopoly of social criticism and change. Third, Shari'ati was accused of wasting the revolutionary energy and potential of the youth by preoccupying and engaging their minds with abstract, pedantic and speculative matters rather than preparing them for radical and revolutionary political change. Fourth, Shari'ati was criticized and ridiculed for his superstitious beliefs and practices, especially his spiritualism. The letter referred to the fact that Shari'ati had participated in occult seances during which spirits were called forth at the University's dormitory. It was argued that such nonsensical activities could only deceive and mislead students, detracting them from revolutionary action, their supposedly primary concern. Finally, on a more personal note, the letter expressed Puyan and Ahmadzadeh's concern about Shari'ati's self-imposed loneliness and political isolation at the time.

Puyan's growing stature as a radical Marxist–Leninist intellectual enhanced the significance of his critique among Mashhad's leftist community. His disapproval of Shari'ati gradually became ever more acerbic and virulent. It is said that Puyan had implied that Shari'ati was an 'American agent' and a 'member of SAVAK'.⁸¹ Tolou' a close friend of both Puyan and Ahmadzadeh rejects the notion that Puyan made such a statement.⁸² He argues that at the time both might have believed that the end result of Shari'ati's activities would benefit the government, but he adds that 'we all knew Shari'ati well enough to know that he could not have been an agent.'

After Puyan's conversion to Marxism in 1966 and Ma'sud Ahmadzadeh's conversion some two years later, a loosely knit cluster of revolutionary left students gradually took shape around them. Puyan, who was at the time studying in Tehran, travelled to Mashhad regularly and became acquainted with Bahman Ajang who had Marxist tendencies even before he entered Mashhad University. It was through Ajang that the Marxist circle primarily composed of students from Mashhad University was constituted. The main figures in this group, the members of which later constituted the Mashhad branch of the Peoples' Fada'ian Guerilla Organization of Iran, were Bahman Ajang, Hamid Tavakoli, Sa'id Aryan (Hamid's brother-in-law) and Ali-Reza Galavi, all of whom were Shari'ati's students.

The relationship between Shari'ati and his Marxist students, who exercised considerable influence among politicized students, was delicate. At first, Shari'ati was branded as 'an agent of the US, the CIA and the Pahlavi regime', and accused

of obstructing the imminent communist revolution in Iran.⁸³ Students taking his course for the first time were warned against his 'sweet talk', which was deemed unlearned, deceptive and politically dangerous. As time went by, however, Shari'ati made an impression on key members of the Marxian circle. Ajang, who took one of Shari'ati's courses and had very much moved his teacher with his final exam essay, soon came to the conclusion that all the rumours about Shari'ati's suspicious allegiances were completely baseless.⁸⁴ In Ajang's view, even though religion was reactionary, Shari'ati wished to modernize Islam. In the process of reviving a modernist Islam, Ajang believed that Shari'ati did not wish to engage the Marxists in a narrow-minded debate. Shari'ati's open-mindedness distinguished him from other religionists. Antipathy toward Shari'ati among the Marxists palpably declined, until at some point there was discussion among their members of the possibility of tactical alliances with Shari'ati. Based on the clear understanding that the two had incompatible ideologies and that 'water and oil could not mix', the Marxists gradually came to accept a critical yet amicable *modus vivendi* with Shari'ati and his followers.

The Marxists' non-antagonistic position towards Shari'ati did not mean intellectual non-engagement. In his classes and outside, Shari'ati came under considerable pressure from this group of students.⁸⁵ He was pressed to clarify his position on idealism and materialism, the historical stages of social development, the definition and essence of social classes and finally the historical role of religion as a catalyst of change. One of his students recalls that many leftist students, who were firm believers in armed struggle as the only justifiable means of political change, at times even abused Shari'ati's modesty and courtesy.⁸⁶ As soon as topics such as 'social class', 'materialism' and the 'role of religion' came up they discredited his ideas with their well prepared discourse. Shari'ati's classes became an arena for the revolutionary Marxists to practise their newly acquired arguments and theories. Shari'ati, however, enjoyed the challenge and allowed them to voice their opinions.

The Religious Establishment Reacts

On one of Shari'ati's trips to Tehran in the autumn of 1968, after the start of his irregular lectures at Ershad a group of well-wishing friends among whom were Motahedin, Bazargan, Motahhari and Falaturi visited him and his father.⁸⁷ At the time, *Eslamshenasi* was at the publishers. The group informed Shari'ati that some of his clerical enemies had already made a list of the errors and misinterpretations they had found in the text of his lecture-notes. He was also informed that Falsafi, a prominent preacher, had already attacked him from the pulpit and in Tabriz a few preachers had been incited to disparage him in the presence of Ayatollah Khosrowshahi. Shari'ati was also told that a few bookshops had conspired to obstruct the distribution of his book in Tehran. In order to scupper the plans of his

enemies, this group hoped in vain that Shari'ati might alter his position on some of the issues raised. The group confronted Shari'ati with a number of problems in *Eslamshenasi*, which in their opinion were controversial. The topics were previously prepared with the help of Motahhari and Bazargan. It should be kept in mind that the issues raised were coming from members of the most open-minded Islamic circles of the time, themselves under pressure from the traditional Islamic circles.

First, according to Shari'ati, after the death of Mohammad human beings had to rely on their own intellect. The group felt that Shari'ati's statement, rejecting the need for edicts based on revelation, undermined the notion that Islam was an eternally valid and dynamic religion.⁸⁸ Second, Shari'ati had argued that during the fifteen years after his marriage, the Prophet had become an embourgeoisified conservative and a defender of the status quo.⁸⁹ The group opined that such a statement was 'absolute infidelity'. Third, in *Eslamshenasi* Shari'ati had rejected the commonly held notion of the Prophet's perfection and argued that the concept of evolution applied even to the Prophet, whom God always instructed to seek more knowledge. Shari'ati's well wishers argued that this position implied that even after his prophethood, Mohammad was still lacking or deficient.⁹⁰ Unsuccessful in convincing Shari'ati to modify or change some of the arguments in his book, the group left in desperation.

In contrast to the Left's swift rebuttal, the religious establishment's reaction to Shari'ati was very slow. Even though anxiety about the content of his lectures and *Eslamshenasi* was voiced in 1968, published clerical criticism did not appear until late 1971, nearly two years after the publication of *Eslamshenasi*. By this time Shari'ati had published numerous other books (mainly his lectures) and clerical criticism was, therefore, directed at both those works and *Eslamshenasi*. Once, however, the first pamphlet and book attacking Shari'ati appeared a long streak of condemnations, villifications and denunciations followed from clerical quarters.

Among the books written by Shari'ati's Islamic antagonists, *Eslamshenasi dar Tarazu-ye Elm va Aql* (Islamology Judged Rationally and Scientifically) by Ebrahim Ansari-e Zanjani focused only on *Eslamshenasi*. The book, which appeared in January 1973, addressed the major problems of *Eslamshenasi* from the point of view of the traditional Shi'i clergy. Ansari-e Zanjani arranged his criticism under three main headings; first, Shari'ati's errors on Islamic issues, second his errors on Shi'ism and finally his position on the clergy.⁹¹

Under the rubric of Shari'ati's errors on Islamic issues, Ansari-e Zanjani presented three major arguments. First, he challenged Shari'ati's position on *khatemiyat* or the finality of Prophethood after Mohammad. This point was similar to that raised by the group of well wishers. Shari'ati had argued that Mohammad's claim to being the last Prophet did not mean that his teachings sufficed mankind until eternity. He argued that after Mohammad, human beings attained a stage in their evolution which enabled them to conduct their affairs on the basis of reason. At this stage they no longer needed to be guided by revelation.

Therefore, Shari'ati argued that after Mohammad, reason replaced revelations as a guide to proper conduct.⁹² Ansari-e Zanjani argued that human reason could never develop to a stage where it could act independently, promulgating perfect laws without reference to or based on revelations. He contended that according to both Shi'a and Sunnis the formulation and promulgation of laws was the monopoly of God and Shari'ati's attempt at divorcing law from its divine origin was 'sheer infidelity (*kufur*) and in contradiction with Islam'.⁹³

Second, Ansari-e Zanjani contested the Islamic justification of Shari'ati's opinion on the equality of men and women. However, he added that since later in the book Shari'ati himself had dismissed his earlier contention and had admitted that Islam did not believe in gender equality, there was no point in pursuing this matter.⁹⁴ On the issue of polygamy and the veil, which Shari'ati had condemned as distasteful and humiliating in the modern age, Ansari-e Zanjani characterized Shari'ati's position as one which 'condemned God and subordinated Him to the rule of His subjects'.⁹⁵ He accused Shari'ati of being both 'ignorant and irreligious'.⁹⁶ Furthermore, he suggested that under the influence of Europeans Shari'ati had rallied against his own 'national practices and traditions'.⁹⁷ In a more provocative tone he submitted that Shari'ati's defence of unveiled women was an apology for sexual promiscuity which he implied was practised at Hosseiniyeh Ershad.⁹⁸

Third, on freedom of thought in Islam, Ansari-e Zanjani argued that in the field of principles of religion, those things that have been made permissible and those that have been categorized as forbidden by the Qur'an and the Prophet will remain fixed until eternity and there can therefore be no room for the application of human thought.⁹⁹ Shari'ati's assertion that freedom of thought constituted a basis of Islam was repudiated by Ansari-e Zanjani who argued that even in cases where the application of independent thought was permissible it was only within the domain of the religious experts or *ulema* to pass judgement. He labelled the intervention of non-experts such as Shari'ati as 'a great mistake and an unforgivable sin'.¹⁰⁰

With reference to Shari'ati's errors in Shi'ism, Ansari-e Zanjani attempted to demonstrate that he not only used Sunni references to prove his arguments, but also sought to vindicate Abu Bakr and Omar from all the charges brought against them by the Shi'a. He pointed out that Shari'ati's use of the two Qur'anic verses on the topic of consultation (*showra*) to justify and promote elections on the basis of majority vote was incorrect.¹⁰¹ Whereas Shari'ati had attempted to prove that Abu Bakr's election as the first caliph was based on democratic procedures, which he tried to promote as one of Islam's socio-political principles, Ansari-e Zanjani argued that the choice of the first caliph was the responsibility of the Prophet and not the people.¹⁰² In accordance with mainstream Shi'i thought he argued that the Prophet had designated Ali as his successor at Qadir. Ansari-e Zanjani held those who disobeyed the will of the Prophet and participated in the 'ominous council and the sinister democracy' responsible for all the misfortunes that had befallen the Islamic community after the death of the Prophet.¹⁰³

The validity of Shari'ati's account of the Prophet's contentment, just before his death, at the sight of Abu Bakr leading the congregational prayers was attacked by Ansari-e Zanjani. He contended that the report (*hadith*) on which Shari'ati had based his argument was invalid since it was considered a weak *hadith* and the reporter was of dubious reputation.¹⁰⁴ On the basis of Shi'i sources, Ansari-e Zanjani argued that the Prophet sent for Ali to lead the prayers and when Abu Bakr disregarded the Prophet's will and led the prayers himself the Prophet pushed him aside angrily and took over.¹⁰⁵ In a lengthy chapter, Ansari-e Zanjani demonstrated the evils of Abu Bakr and Omar. He claimed that Ali Shari'ati, his father Mohammad-Taqi and the Hosseiniyeh Ershad had always attempted to prove the piety of Abu Bakr and Omar while covering up the 'betrayals and villainies' of these two caliphs.¹⁰⁶

Concerning Shari'ati's position on the clergy, Ansari-e Zanjani argued that the whole purpose of writing *Eslamshenasi* had been to slander, vilify, attack and destroy them.¹⁰⁷ He rejected Shari'ati's notion that the clergy in Islam were intermediaries and that their necessity hinged on this function.¹⁰⁸ In response to Shari'ati's claim that the clergy's privileges were undeserved and that they constituted a hegemonic, dictatorial force over the people and that this situation gave rise to inequality, he claimed that since the clergy were steeped in science and knowledge it was only natural and fair that they would not be equal to others.¹⁰⁹ Regarding Shari'ati's contention that an official clerical institution (*sazeman-e rasmi-e rowhaniyat*) has no place in Islam, Ansari-e Zanjani claimed that if by the 'official clerical institution' Shari'ati alluded to an all-clergy institution, he would concur with Shari'ati. However, the criteria for membership was not the clerical garb but the educational process necessary for such a position. He argued that even people such as Shari'ati or Bazargan who did not wear the religious garb could become members of this institution only if they were to study the required texts with experts in the field of religious science.¹¹⁰ Shari'ati's characterization of the clergy as hidebound and narrow-minded was rejected by Ansari-e Zanjani, who argued that they were the defenders of the faith and acted according to the dictates of Islam.¹¹¹ In conclusion Shari'ati was accused of being in the service of Saudi Arabian Wahhabis and regurgitating old and deviant ideas.¹¹² Shari'ati was also threatened and reminded that in Islam deviants are initially invited to understand the truth through debate; but if they continue to dispute the truth, then force would have to be used against them.¹¹³

Later, though wounded, Shari'ati lamented that among his detractors it was only Seyyed Ebrahim Ansari-e Zanjani who he would never forgive for having slandered and defamed the women who had attended his lectures. Enraged at the accusation that the women at Ershad were simply there to engage in 'sexual promiscuity', Shari'ati warned, 'woe if there be a tomorrow after today.'¹¹⁴ Even a 'hireling and a slut,' he wrote, 'would not be so unscrupulous as to make such accusations.'¹¹⁵