

## **Scholars of Islam/Muslims**

### **Fatema Mernissi**

Fatema Mernissi is a Moroccan feminist writer and sociologist. She was born into a middle-class family in Fez in 1940. She received her primary education in a school established by the nationalist movement, and secondary level education in an all-girls school funded by the French protectorate.<sup>[1]</sup> In 1957, she studied political science at the Sorbonne and at Brandeis University, where she earned her doctorate.

She returned to work at the Mohammed V University and taught at the Faculte des Letters between 1974 and 1981 on subjects such as methodology, family sociology and psycho sociology. She has become noted internationally mainly as an Islamic feminist.

As an Islamic feminist, Mernissi is largely concerned with Islam and women's roles in it, analyzing the historical development of Islamic thought and its modern manifestation. Through a detailed investigation of the nature of the succession to Muhammad, she casts doubt on the validity of some of the hadith (sayings and traditions attributed to him), and therefore the subordination of women that she sees in Islam, but not necessarily in the Qur'an.

As a sociologist Mernissi has done fieldwork mainly in Morocco. On several occasions in the late 1970s and early 1980s she conducted interviews in order to map prevailing attitudes to women and work. She has done sociological research for UNESCO and ILO as well as for the Moroccan authorities.

In the late 1970s and in the 1980s Mernissi contributed articles to periodicals and other publications on women in Morocco and women and Islam from a contemporary as well as from a historical perspective.

In 2003, Mernissi was awarded the Prince of Asturias Award along with Susan Sontag.

Mernissi is currently a lecturer at the Mohammed V University of Rabat and a research scholar at the University Institute for Scientific Research, in the same city. She retired from the University in 2005 in order to focus on writing alone.

*List of Books*

1. Beyond the Veil
2. Islam and Democracy
3. Las Sultanas Olvidadas
4. Scheherazade Goes West
5. The Veil and the Male Elite
6. Un Libro Para La Paz

**Ali Shariati**

Ali Shariati was born in Mazinan, a suburb of Mashhad, Iran. He completed his elementary and high school in Mashhad. In his years at the Teacher's Training College, he came into contact with youth who were from the lower economic strata of the society and tasted the poverty and hardship that existed.

At the age of eighteen, he started as a teacher and ever since had been a student as well as a teacher. After graduating from college in 1960, on a scholarship he pursued graduate studies in France. Dr. Shariati, an honor student, received his doctorate in sociology in 1964 from Sorbonne University.

When he returned to Iran he was arrested at the border and imprisoned on the pretext that he had participated in political activities while studying in France. Released in 1965, he began teaching again at Mashhad University. As a Muslim sociologist, he sought to explain the problems of Muslim societies in the light of Islamic principles-explaining them and discussing them with his students. Very soon he gained popularity with the students and different social classes in Iran. For this reason, the regime felt obliged to discontinue his courses at the university.

Then he was transferred to Teheran. There, Dr. Shariati continued his very active and brilliant career. His lectures at Houssein-e-Ershad Religious Institute

attracted not only six thousand students who registered in his summer classes, but also many thousands of people from different backgrounds who were fascinated by his teachings.

The first edition of his book ran over sixty thousand copies which were quickly sold-out, despite the obstructive interference by the authorities in Iran. Faced with the outstanding success of Dr. Shariati's courses, the Iranian police surrounded Houssein-e-Ershad Institute, arrested many of his followers and thereby put an end to his activities. For the second time, he underwent an eighteen month prison term under extremely harsh conditions. Popular pressure and international protests obliged the Iranian regime to release Dr. Shariati on March 20, 1975. However, he remained under close surveillance by the security agents of Iran. This was no freedom at all since he could neither publish his thoughts nor contact his students. Under such stifling conditions according to the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed he realized that he should migrate out of the country. Successful in his attempt, he went to England but was martyred three weeks later on June 19, 1977 allegedly by the ubiquitous SAVAK.

Dr. Shariati studied and experienced many philosophical, theological and social schools of thought with an Islamic view. One could say that he was a Muslim Muhajir who rose from the depth of the ocean of eastern mysticism, ascended to the heights of the formidable mountains of western social sciences, yet was not overwhelmed, and he returned to our midst with all the jewels of this fantastic voyage.

He was neither a reactionary fanatic who opposed anything that was new without any knowledge nor was he of the so-called westernized intellectuals who imitated the west without independent judgment.

Knowledgeable about the conditions and forces of his time, he began his Islamic revival with enlightenment of the masses, particularly the youth. He believed that if these elements of the society had true faith, they would totally dedicate themselves and become active and Mujahid elements who would give everything including their lives-for their ideals.

Dr. Shariati constantly fought to create humanitarian values in the young generation, a generation whose values have been defaced with the help of the most scientific and technical methods. He vigorously tried to re-introduce the Quran and

Islamic history to the youth so that they may find their true selves in all their human dimensions and fight all the decadent societal forces.

Dr. Shariati wrote many books. In all his writings, he tried to present a clear and genuine picture of Islam. He strongly believed that if the intellectuals and new generation realized the truth of this faith attempts toward social change would be successful.

*Publications*

1. Al-Imam Ali
2. Approach to Understanding of Islam
3. Art Awaiting the Savior
4. Culture and Ideology
5. Fatima is Fatima
6. Hajj
7. Jihad and Shahadat
8. Man and Islam
9. My Flowers
10. On the Sociology of Islam
11. One Followed by Eternity of Zeros
12. Red Shi'ism
13. Reflection of Humanity
14. Religion Vs. Religion
15. School of Thought and Action
16. The Visage of Muhammad