




Rereading Ali Shariati's Theory of Muslim Decadence

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 17 October 2024 Received in revised form: 04 June 2025 Accepted: 10 June 2025 Published online: 22 June 2025</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Ideology; Islamic Civilization; Muslim Decadence; True Islam.</i></p>	<p>The emergence of diverse social and cultural challenges in Islamic Iran over many decades and centuries has prompted numerous thinkers - drawing on different theoretical perspectives and scholarly frameworks - to describe, analyze, and explain this profound and wide - ranging problem, as well as to propose various solutions for its improvement. Among these thinkers, Ali Shariati stands out for his analysis of the issue through the lens of Muslim decline, an approach shaped by his sociological and historical education. In addressing the fundamental question of the causes behind the decline of Muslims, Shariati first identifies the distancing from true Islam as the central issue. He then examines the underlying causes of this deviation and its role in the deterioration of Muslim societies, before offering strategies for returning to authentic Islam. In his view, among the multiple causes contributing to this deviation, the transformation of Islam's ideological foundation constitutes the most fundamental factor. Consequently, restoring Islam's ideological essence is both the most challenging remedy and the foremost responsibility of intellectuals. The present study employs a library - based research method with the objective of systematically examining Shariati's interpretation of the decline of Muslims, analyzing the causes and mechanisms of deviation from true Islam, and evaluating the solutions he proposes for reviving the ideological and transformative dimensions of the faith.</p>

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1. Introduction

Islam rapidly expanded across vast territories and emerged as the world's leading civilization. However, like other civilizations, it eventually entered a period of decline - a phenomenon that has been a central concern for Muslims, including Iranians, for centuries. This study reexamines Ali Shariati's theory in addressing this issue, seeking to answer the fundamental question: What causes led Muslims to fall from the peak of civilization, and what solutions can overcome this condition?

The research proceeds in three stages. First, it examines Shariati's understanding and description of Islam. Second, it analyzes, more comprehensively than previous studies, the causes and factors he identifies for the decline. Third, it explores the solutions he proposes to reverse this trajectory..

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach based on a comprehensive review of Ali Shariati's writings. Through critical examination of his theoretical framework, the research identifies key factors contributing to the decline of Muslim civilization and evaluates proposed solutions for its revival. Library research and content analysis methods are utilized to systematically interpret the concepts and arguments presented by Shariati

3. Findings

Islamology - According to Shariati, Islam comprises seven interrelated components: worldview, anthropology, philosophy of history, sociology, ideology, ideal society, and ideal man. The foundation is the worldview, upon which anthropology, philosophy of history, and ideology are constructed, ultimately providing the framework for an ideal society and ideal human being. The Islamic worldview is grounded in monotheism, which, beyond affirming the oneness of God, envisions the universe as an indivisible whole - rejecting dualisms such as this world and the hereafter, nature and the supernatural, matter and meaning, or body and soul (Shariati, 1979, p. 29). Monotheism, in this sense, has four dimensions: (1) worldview, (2) social and class foundation, (3) historical insight and philosophy, and (4) moral values. For Shariati, anthropology, sociology, and the philosophy of history are all branches of worldview and form the foundation of ideology (Shariati, 1996, p. 28).

Core Elements of Islam - From Shariati's perspective, each intellectual school must answer several fundamental questions, reflected in seven key principles: worldview, anthropology, philosophy of history, sociology, ideology, ideal man, and ideal society. Religions, in addition, are defined by four essential components: God or the deity, the sacred book, the prophet, and the exemplary figures of the tradition. For example, to understand Judaism, one must study Yahweh, Moses (PBUH), the Torah, and Aaron. Similarly, to understand Islam, one must grasp the reality of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Qur'an, and influential companions such as Abu Dharr, Salman, and Imam Ali (PBUH).

Causes of Muslim Decline - Shariati attributes the decline primarily to deviation from true Islam, which he explains through several key transformations:

1. **From Ideological Islam to Cultural Islam** - Ideological Islam encompasses a comprehensive worldview that directs all aspects of life, functioning as a living faith rather than a collection of static sciences. Over time, this dynamic vision has been replaced by a cultural, ritualistic form of Islam (Shariati, 1996, p. 71).
2. **Turning Religion into an End Rather Than a Means** - Religion, intended as a path to elevate humanity toward God, has instead become an object of devotion in itself, diverting focus from its transformative purpose (Shariati, 1996, p. 47).

3. Historical Discontinuity - Civilizations falter when they lose continuity with their historical memory, forgetting their triumphs, struggles, and revolutions, and thus returning to states of ignorance.
4. Loss of Unity - Early Islam maintained a unified vision across diverse peoples, but over time, internal divisions and sectarian disputes fractured the unity of its message (Shariati, 1996, p. 322).
5. Neglecting the Requirements of the Time - While the essence of Islam is eternal, its expression must adapt to the evolving needs and contexts of society; failure to do so conflates outdated forms with timeless truths (Shariati, 1983, p. 56).
6. Distortion of Islamic Teachings - The culmination of these factors manifests in the corruption of Islamic concepts and practices. For Shariati, "Alawite Shi'ism" represents true Islam, while "Safavid Shi'ism" symbolizes its deviation (Shariati, 1983, p. 155).

4. Conclusion

Proposed Solutions - Shariati's remedy for decline is a return to the cultural and spiritual resources of the Islamic past - without fossilizing tradition - through:

1. Reviving Ideological Islam - Restoring Islam as a living, guiding faith and intellectual movement (Shariati, 1996, p. 71).
2. Reclaiming Cultural and Spiritual Capital - Drawing upon the heritage preserved by earlier generations to combat cultural and economic impoverishment (Shariati, 1989, p. 297).
3. Contextualizing Islam for the Present - Understanding Islam in its original socio - historical context, then rearticulating it for contemporary needs (Shariati, 1982, p. 91).
4. Engaging the Masses - Bridging the gap between intellectuals and society by communicating truth in accessible and compelling ways (Shariati, 1989, p. 254).
5. Permanent Revolution through Ijtihad - Sustaining renewal and reform by exercising dynamic, progressive jurisprudence and enjoining what is right while forbidding what is wrong (Shariati, 1989, p. 395).

Through this framework, Shariati positions the revival of ideological Islam, historical consciousness, and adaptive reform as the cornerstones for restoring Islamic civilization.

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