



ḲALILI, ‘ABBĀS

ḲALILI, ‘ABBĀS, political activist, journalist, translator, poet, and novelist (b. Najaf, 1895; d. Tehran, 1971; [Figure 1](#)).

LIFE

Ḳalili was born to a cleric, Sheikh Asad-Allāh, who educated him in Persian and Arabic language and literature. Later, Ḳalili studied Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic philosophy at the seminaries of Najaf in the 1910s (see Mahyār Ḳalili, p. 17; no dates are available for early years of his life; see also [iraq xi. shī‘ite seminaries](#)).

The British occupation of Iraq after World War I led to the emergence of an Iraqi resistance movement in 1918-19, when Iraqi religious authorities called for a jihad (see [islam in iran xi. jihad in islam](#)) against British occupation. A number of anti-colonial secret societies were also formed in the period, among them the Society for Islamic Movement (Jam‘iyat-e nahẓat-e eslāmi; also known as ‘The League of the Islamic Awakening’ in British publications). The young Ḳalili was among the founders of the Society and served as its secretary (Tabarrā‘iān, p. 43; Sepehr, p. 70; Ārianpur, p. 264; Şadr Hāşemi, p. 227; Mahyār Ḳalili, p. 17). Following the assassination of Captain W. M. Marshall, the British Political Officer in Najaf, at the hands of the Society, the British blockaded the city, executed a number of revolutionaries, and exiled many others. Ḳalili was also sentenced to death, but he fled to Iran and lived in Rasht for three years, using the alias Sheikh ‘Ali Fatiy-al-Eslām. His Arabic accent caused some to call him Ḳalili-e Arab (“Ḳalili the Arab”; Behzādi, p. 207). He



nonetheless regarded Iran as his homeland (Şafā’i, p. 267).

After a general amnesty was declared in Iraq, he revealed his true identity and began working as an Arabic translator for *Ra’d*, a newspaper published by Sayyed Żiā’-al-Din Ṭabāṭabā’i (q.v.; Maḥyār Ḳalili, pp. 17-18). Afterwards, with the help of Sayyed Żiā’, he was put in charge of the *Baladiya* newspaper (see *baladiya*, no. 9). He was also involved with *Bahār*, a Persian literary, scientific, and political monthly founded by Mirzā Yusof Khan Āštiāni, known as E’teşām-al-Molk (1874-1938; see *e’teşāmi*). After Sayyed Żiā’ left Iran in 1921, Ḳalili founded *Eqdām* (Ārianpur, p. 264; Golbon, p. 25), a newspaper covering news and social issues, which was initially published three times a week and later as a daily, during the period of 1921-27. In 1927, *Eqdām* was shut down along with many other Persian newspapers, signaling a crackdown on press freedoms by Reżā Shah (Şadr Hāşemi, p. 227).

Ḳalili was a confidant and an influential supporter of Reżā Khan Sardār Sepah (later Reżā Shah, r. 1925-41), and he mediated in the rivalry between Sardār Sepah and Sayyed Ḥasan Modarres, a very influential political cleric of the 1920s. He was part of a group of influential journalists and newspapers who actively supported Sardār Sepah through their publications, and through his articles in *Eqdām* he contributed to the overthrow of the Qajar dynasty and the coming to power of Sardār Sepah (Ḳalili, p. 159).

During the period of 1922-29, Ḳalili worked as a translator in the Legal Office of the Ministry of Justice (Edāra-ye ḥoquqi-e Wezārat-e ‘adliya). After *Eqdām* was closed in 1927, he spent the next two decades working as a businessman and writing novels (Maḥyār Ḳalili, p. 19; see below).

After Moḥammad Reżā Shah (r. 1941-79) succeeded his father to the Pahlavi throne, Ḳalili maintained close relations with the new Shah and Aḥmad Qawām, and began to republish *Eqdām* (Behzādi, p. 209). Occupation of Iran by Allied forces during 1941-45 led to a rare and short-lived period of freedom of expression. During this time, readers were increasingly drawn to Ḳalili’s powerful and passionately written articles (Behzādi, pp. 200-202). For a time *Eqdām* was among the most widely circulated, influential, and admired newspapers in the country. After several years, however, with a rise in the number of rival publications and increased competition, Ḳalili’s editorial pieces, with their marked romantic overtones, lost their appeal among Persian readers, and *Eqdām* was permanently closed in 1949 (Behzādi, p. 203).



In 1949 he became Iranian ambassador to Yemen and Ethiopia. After his return in 1952, he was appointed to the board of Iran's Fishery Company (Šerkat-e šilāt-e Irān; Mahyār Ḳalili, p. 19).

Ḳalili led a turbulent personal life; he was married four times and had six children—four sons and two daughters—including the famous poet Simin Behbahāni, whose mother was Faḵr 'Ozmā Arġun, Ḳalili's second wife (Mahyār Ḳalili, p. 20). Faḵr 'Ozmā was a progressive poet and writer, translator, and women's rights activist as well as editor of the newspaper *Āyanda-ye Irān* (Golbon, p. 26). She met Ḳalili after the publication in *Eqdām* of one of her poems.

In the final years of his life, Ḳalili spent his time alone, abandoned by most of his family (Şafā'i, p. 265), writing articles for journals and magazines such as *Tehrān-e moşavvar*, *Sepid o siāh*, and *Vaḥid* (Behzādi, p. 210). He died of a heart attack in Tehran in 1971.

LITERARY WORKS

Poetry and translation. Ḳalili composed poems in both Persian and Arabic. Based on a readers' survey in 1953, conducted by *al-Moqtatef*, an Arabic language magazine printed in Egypt, one of his poems was rated as the best among submitted poems (Behzādi, p. 202; Mahyār Ḳalili, p. 18). Among Ḳalili's translations were 1,100 verses of Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* as well as several of Sa'di's poems into Arabic, which were published in Egypt and Lebanon. *Zendāniān*, his translation of Maxim Gorky's *The Prisoners*, appeared in Tehran, 1931. Ḳalili also translated 14 volumes of *Ebn al-Aṭir's al-Kāmel fi'l-tāriḳ* as *Kāmel: Tāriḳ-e bozorg-e Eslām va Irān* (The complete history of Islam and Iran), in seven volumes (ed. Mahyār Ḳalili, Tehran, n.d.). His translation of the first volume of Aḥmad Amin Meşri's *Žohā al-eslām* (The light of Islam), appeared as *Partov-e eslām* (3 vols., Tehran, 1936-37). Ḳalili also authored *Kuroş-e bozorg* (Cyrus the Great, Tehran, 1966) and *Tāriḳ-e eslām o Irān* (The history of Islam and Iran, Tehran, 1969).

Social novels. Ḳalili is among the most noted of the first generation of Iran's social novelists whose works were influenced by the literary naturalism of European novelists like Emile Zola. Following Moşafeq Kāzemi's (1902-77) *Tehrān-e maḳof* (Horrible Tehran, Tehran, 1922), Ḳalili published four romantic novels in the 1920s dealing mostly with the unfair position of women in the early decades of the 20th century (Ārianpur, p. 264; Kamshad, p. 59).



Ḳalili's most acclaimed novel, *Ruzgār-e siāh*, which, like most of these novels, revolves around the tale of fallen women and plagued cities, received unprecedented attention and was reprinted after a short period of time (Şadr Hāşemi, p. 228). The protagonist of the novel, an educated woman from a wealthy family who has fallen into prostitution, narrates the story of her life to a novelist who, exhausted by political engagements, has taken refuge in a village. She talks about the bankruptcy and subsequent death of her father during Ḳiābāni's (1880-1920) uprising in Tabriz in 1919, and the death of her brother in a battle with Mirzā Kuček Khan's Jangali forces in 1920-21 (see [jangali movement](#)). In addition to losing her father and brother, the woman's misfortunes continue when her mother's second husband, a cleric, swindles her out of her inheritance. After being forced into an unsuitable marriage, she has numerous sexual relationships with government officials and army officers.

Following *Ruzgār-e siāh*, Ḳalili wrote a number of novels, including *Enteqām* (Revenge, Tehran, 1925), *Asrār-e šab* (Mysteries of the night, Tehran, 1926), *Dāstān-e emruz* (Today's story, Tehran, 1931), *Šārlot* (Charlotte, Tehran, 1931), *Čāl-e gāv* (The pit of a cow, Tehran, 1931), *Fajāye'* (Tragedies, Tehran, 1932), *Bārān* (Rain, Tehran, 1932), *Ḳoruš* (The roar, Tehran, 1954). Meanwhile, he also published a collection of stories called *Ḳiālāt* (Illusions, Tehran, 1930). Most of these works were published in the form of serials in *Eqdām*. Suffering from a preponderance of social commentary at the expense of plausibility and aesthetic considerations, none of these works became as popular as his first novel, *Pir-Čāk-e Irāni* (Iranian Pir-Chak, Tehran, 1922). Ḳalili's sequel to his earlier detective story, *Pir-Čāk-e Hendi* (Indian Pir-Chak, Tehran, 1927), featured Reza Shah as the story's protagonist (Behzādi, pp. 200-201). Unlike most of the novels of his era, Ḳalili's works are relatively short in length. With the exception of *Ensān* (Mankind, Tehran, 1925), most of his novels follow a style similar to that of *Ruzgār-e siāh* (Ārianpur, p. 265). *Ensān*, however, is a noteworthy piece centered on a dialogue between the narrator and an elderly sage, in which they discuss their journey throughout the poverty-stricken neighborhoods of Tehran (for a list of Ḳalili's works, see Moşār, III, s.v.).

Ḳalili's novels, in general, suffer from a flawed structure. Rather than providing the readers with a description of the scenes and events, he narrates the story like a passionate orator and curses humanity for its social and moral degeneration. In his stories, reminiscent of Alexander Dumas's adventure novels, fiction and essay styles co-mingle, and a dark romanticism prevails.



Asrār-e šab, composed in the form of letters written by the female protagonist, tells the story of a woman who has become a prostitute seeking revenge against men as a result of her husband's betrayal (Ārianpur, p. 270). Similarly, in *Enteqām*, a woman is telling the story of her misfortunes to her son. His stories, which are usually narrated within a frame story, suffer from an unhappy blend of prose translations of European poetry and Persian romantic classical elements (Kamshad, p. 61), and are encumbered by obscure Arabic terms as well as obsolete and far-fetched literary allusions and metaphors (Ārianpur, p. 268).

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