



# KEŠĀVARZ ŞADR, AMIR HUŞANG

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**KEŠĀVARZ ŞADR, AMIR-HUŞANG** (b. Tehran, 19 January 1933; d. West Palm Beach, Florida, 13 February 2013; [Figure 1](#)), a distinguished sociologist expert on rural and tribal societies in Iran. He was also a member, and later one of the leaders, of Moḥammad Moşaddeq’s National Front (Jebha-ye melli).

Keşāvarz Şadr’s father, Sayyed Moḥammad-‘Ali Keşāvarz Şadr (1902-74), was a prominent politician twice elected as a deputy for Korramābād (Lorestān) to the 15th (1947) and 16th (1950) sessions of the Majles. Moḥammad-‘Ali joined the National Front and soon became one of Moşaddeq’s supporters, leading to his appointment as the governor of Tehran, Gilān, and Isfahan. He was arrested and imprisoned in Isfahan after the coup d’etat of 1953 (q.v.). Later on, he resumed his political activities as the spokesperson of the Second National Front (Ḥājyusofi and Keşāvarz, pp. 10-12; Markaz-e barrasi-e asnād, pp. 33-34). He died on 16 July 1974.

Amir-Huşang Keşāvarz Şadr spent the first decade of his childhood in provincial cities, especially in Komeyn and Arāk, where he completed part of his primary education. He returned to Tehran during the socially bustling years following the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941, an ambiance radically different from the isolated atmosphere of the provinces. During his high school years, he met new friends with whom he engaged in discussions and debates on social issues. Influenced by Aḥmad Kasravi’s criticisms of the



prevalent beliefs of the traditional society, they considered themselves “progressive.” During their last years at Firuz-Bahrām high school, Kešāvarz and a few of his friends joined the Democratic Youth Organization (Sāzmān-e javānān) of the Tudeh party, participated in the classes held at the party cells, and followed the Tudeh party directives (personal interviews). In the period around 1953 coup, they would go to assigned meeting places with the hope of receiving orders to confront the events. Kešāvarz was arrested on the day of the coup and released in the evening in the absence of incriminating evidence. In 1953, he married Zariun Žilā.

Following his secondary education, he entered Tehran University in 1958, where he was taught by Ġolām-Ĥosayn Şadiqi (1905-92), a close associate of Moşaddeq, which led to serious transformations in Kešāvarz’s beliefs and political leanings. Around autumn 1959, demonstrations by high school and university students in tandem with street clashes gradually punctured the oppressive political ambience of the post-coup years. The National Front entered the political scene and, on 21 July 1960, announced the founding of the Second National Front. Tehran University became the bustling hub of political activities and the National Front sympathizers resumed their activities. Kešāvarz joined the National Front at Tehran University, and, in the fall of 1960, was elected as the student representative of the Faculty of Literature to the Student Committee at the university and later joined the editorial board of the National Front’s university publication, *Payām-e dāneşju* (personal interviews; Rustā et al., p. 25). At the first national congress of the National Front in December 1962, Kešāvarz was officially elected as a member of the National Front’s University Committee, representing students at the Faculty of Literature (Markaz-e barrasi-e asnād, pp. 46, 48, 105). During this period, National Front activities at the university provided an umbrella for the cooperation and alliance of nationalists, leftists, and religious forces militating in favour of political reform, socio-political liberties, and the upholding of the law according to the Constitution. It was in the course of these years of student politicking that Kešāvarz established long and sustained friendly relations and political association with a wide spectrum of political figure. Between 1960 and 1963, he was arrested and imprisoned six times (personal interviews; Markaz-e barrasi-e asnād, pp. 342, 368; Rustā et al., pp. 25-26).

Active opposition by religious forces against the shah’s proposed reforms, which culminated in the boycotting of the shah’s referendum on 26 January 1963, eventually led to the bloody repression of the 5 June 1963



demonstrations and the arrest of Komeyni and his subsequent exile in November 1964. The assassination of Prime Minister Hasan-‘Ali Manşur on 21 January 1965, and the attempted assassination of the shah on 10 April 1965, resulted in a suffocating political atmosphere and left the shah with a free hand to exercise absolute rule.

With the closure of legal, peaceful means of political life, Keşavarz turned to the academic world, concentrating on the rural and tribal issues in Iran, which led him to travel around the country to conduct his field research. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in social sciences (1963) and his M. A. degree in anthropology (1967). While studying towards his B.A. degree, he was employed as a part-time research assistant at Tehran University’s Institute of Social Studies and Research. He had been employed at the Senate Library since 1955 and continued his part-time work there until the mid-sixties. Upon the receipt of his MA degree, he was employed as a full-time researcher in the Tribal Studies department of the same institute (1967-73), during which he began his field work and research among Iranian tribes and in rural areas, the result of which are his numerous monographs on these topics. In 1971, he received a “Certificate for Formulation and Evaluation of Social Projects” from the United Nation’s Asian Institute in Tehran and, in 1972, he received another certificate from the Asian Institute in Thailand on “The Socio-Economic Barriers to Rural Development in Iran” (private archive; Keşavarz Şadr, 1972). From 1973 to 1976, he was the director of the Department of Tribal Studies at the Institute of Social Studies and Research, where he trained, organized, and led research teams on field investigations among Iranian tribes.

In 1976, he applied to the Ph. D. program in Manchester University’s Department of Sociology, but that same year, the Office of Regional Development at the Budget and Planning Organization (*Sāzmān-a barnāma va budja*) recruited him to lead the research team responsible for formulating a program to decentralize rural development in Iran. Concurrently he began to lecture on “Research Methodology in the Social Sciences” and “Social Anthropology” at Tehran and Isfahan universities as well as Tehran’s Advanced School of Commerce (*Madrasa-ye ‘āli-e bāzargāni*). Also in 1976, he became the director of the Center for the Study of Endogenous Development, newly founded to conduct research, provide policy, and act as a think tank for the Selseleh Regional Development Project (*Ṭarḥ-e tawsa‘a-ye manṭaqa-i selsela*), which had been operating in Lorestān. During his two-year management (1976-78), he launched an all-encompassing, grass-root and



participatory research project based on collective questionnaires, which was a novel initiative in the field of rural research (Markaz-e moṭāla‘āt-e tawsa‘a-ye darunzā, 1977a-d).

As the oppositional movement prior to the Revolution of 1978-79 gathered momentum, he resigned from his governmental positions in order to participate freely in the social and political activities. In January of 1979, Prime Minister Şāpur Baḳtiār (1914-91) invited him to join his cabinet, but he refused despite his long-time friendship with Baḳtiār (personal interviews).

On 11 February 1979, he was invited by Premier Mehdi Bāzargān (1907-95) to join the government. He was initially offered the governorship of Isfahan, which he refused, claiming that he did not have the necessary expertise. He subsequently accepted a position in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Construction. He was first put in charge of “evaluation and supervision” in the ministry (May 1979) to conduct a study of the problems facing the rural population and their habitat. From the outset of his involvement with the Bāzargān government, he set a pre-condition whereby he would not receive a salary or any kind of perks related to his activities and remained adamantly committed to it (private archive; personal interviews). In June 1979, he was appointed deputy minister in charge of “Projects and Evaluations.” He continued to work in this capacity, but his efforts were stifled by the extremists who were imposing their will on the government apparatus and forced him to discontinue his work. He eventually resigned in September 1979.

Meanwhile, those members and sympathizers of the National Front who had become disappointed with the unfolding of the revolution and sought to revive the aspirations of the National Front approached Şadiqi. Şadiqi, who had ended his collaboration with the National Front, agreed to assume its leadership and reorganize it. A new council was formed and, upon Şadiqi’s recommendation, Kešāvarz became a member of the council in May 1979 and was subsequently elected as a member of the Executive Council of the National Front in June 1979 (personal interviews; Rustā et al., p. 29).

Abu’l-Ḥasan Banişadr, the country’s first president, whose friendship with Kešāvarz dated back to the early 1960s and their political activities as National Front-affiliated students at Tehran University, appointed him as his chief advisor for agricultural and rural development. From June 1980 until Banişadr’s impeachment on 21 June 1981, Kešāvarz served in this capacity with the same financial arrangement as that in Bāzargān’s government. This



was his last governmental position before going into hiding and leaving Iran clandestinely (personal interviews; Rustā et al., p. 28).

Struggle within the factions of the ruling body intensified daily. Bāzargān's resignation in 1979 enabled the Revolutionary Council to appoint its trusted religious figures to key positions of power. The National Front called for a demonstration commemorating the uprising of 30 Tir 1331 (20 July 1952), marking the return of Moṣaddeq to power. This demonstration was violently repressed by the Hezbollah and other extremist religious groups. The National Front's last-ditch effort to counter what it believed to be the onslaught of the reactionary religious forces was in reaction to the ratification of the Islamic law of *qeṣāṣ* (lex talionis). On 15 June 1981, the National Front called on its followers to demonstrate against this law and once again the demonstrators were brutally attacked and beaten up by the Hezbollah. Khomeyni ruled that the followers of the National Front were apostates (*mortadd*). Kešāvarz, who was heavily involved in the preparation of this demonstration and had received word about plans to repress it, left his residence on 14 June 1981 and took refuge elsewhere (personal interviews; Rustā et al., p. 31). A week later, the huge demonstration planned by People's Mojahedin Organization (Sāzmān-e mojāhedīn-e kalq-e Irān) turned into a bloody confrontation with the armed and unarmed supporters of the regime. From this watershed day, the conditions rapidly deteriorated for the opposition. Banišadr was impeached and the wave of arrests and execution of the opposition forces continued for months. Due to the harsh political environment, Kešāvarz, accompanied by a number of friends, clandestinely travelled to Pakistan and subsequently arrived in Paris on 17 November 1981, where he lived as a political refugee (personal interviews; Rustā et al., p. 47).

At the time, Paris was the hub of the most significant Iranian opposition forces abroad. Their political activity revolved around the axis of overthrowing the regime and returning to Iran. Kešāvarz had extensive relations with the opposition forces, but he did not join any political organizations during his early years in Paris. As his stay abroad dragged on, he began thinking of launching a cultural project aimed at creating an archive of political publications and manuscripts dating back to the pre-revolution decades, as well as collecting the on-going cultural products of the diaspora period. Along with two of his friends (Shahram Ghanbari and Ali Rahnema), he founded the Center for Iranian Documentation and Research (CIDR) on 8 March 1986 as a non-profit organization (*Journal officiel de la République Française*, 10 March



1986). He subsequently dedicated his time to expanding and enriching the database of the Center, indexing and publishing its archives and promoting it. In 1991, he travelled to Chicago, where he founded the Dehkhoda Library and Cultural Center (personal interviews).

In 2008, under Kešāvarz Şadr's auspices, a research fund commemorating the ethical and scholarly stature of Ğolām-Ĥosayn Şadiqi was created at the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. Kešāvarz hoped that the Şadiqi research fund could help finance research on the social history of Iran. In November 2008, in recognition of his contribution to the rural and tribal research in Iran, IISH awarded him with the title of Honorary Researcher (<https://socialhistory.org/en/news/amir-houshang-keshavarz>).

Political events and politics in its broadest sense remained one of Kešāvarz's major preoccupations during his years of separation from Iran. In the papers presented in this period (e.g., Kešāvarz Şadr, 2010), he mainly poses questions concerning the roots of Iran's Constitutional Revolution, the position of the religious law (*şari'a*) in relation to political power in Iran, the status of intellectuals in Iran, the relation between ethics and politics, and the concept of the trustworthy notables among the people. He was active in the founding of the Movement of Democratic and Laic Republicans of Iran in Paris and, during its first plenary meeting in September 2004, he was elected to its coordinating counsel (personal interviews). He was a popular and respected political figure among Iranian refugees and activists. He spent the final years of his life in the company of his family in the United States, and passed away in Florida on 13 February 2013. Less than a month later, a memorial session attended by a large number of his friends and comrades was held for him in Paris. Commemoration ceremonies were held by his friends also in the United States and other European cities.

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