



## ŠĀYGĀN, 'ALI

ŠĀYGĀN, 'ALI (ALI SHAYEGAN; b. Shiraz, 12 Esfand 1281 Š./1 March 1903; d. Westwood, New Jersey, 20 Ordibehešt 1360 Š./10 May 1981, [FIGURE 1](#)), law scholar, author, academician, and one of the closest associates of the prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh (Moḥammad Moṣaddeq). He was an Iranian patriot committed to democracy and independence for his homeland. He worked closely with Mossadegh during the Anglo-Iranian dispute over the nationalization of the oil industry and served as one of his advisors when the case was taken to the International Court of Justice in The Hague (see [ANGLO-PERSIAN OIL COMPANY](#)). He served as minister of education in the cabinet formed by Aḥmad Qawām (Qawām-al-Salṭana) in 1946 and was a major factor in the creation of the Iranian National Front (*Jebha-ye melli*). He was elected as a representative from Tehran in the sixteenth session of the Majles (Parliament), where he proved himself a leading member of the National Front faction under Mossadegh.

Šāygān received his elementary and high school education in Shiraz, and then, after graduating from high school in 1921, he attended the School of Political Science (Madrasa-ye 'āli-e 'olum-e siāsi) in Tehran, which was then headed by the celebrated scholar 'Ali-Akbar Dehḡodā, with whom he formed a close bond. In 1928, having passed the qualification test for study abroad, he was sent by the government to France, where he first attended Lyon University and then the University of Paris, where he received his doctoral degree in law (Šāygān, I, pp. 41-46).

On his return to Iran in 1934, Šāygān was hired as an associate professor by



the [Faculty of Law](#) at the University of Tehran and, shortly later, was appointed associate dean (*mo'āwen*), due to his close relation with Dehḵodā, who was the dean and had great confidence in him as an erudite scholar with high integrity. Šāygān served in that position until 1941, when Dehḵodā left his position (Šāygān, I, p. 49). According to Aḥmad Šāygān, who cites Šāygān's personal diaries (Šāygān, I, p. 71), in 1946 the faculty council unanimously voted for Šāygān, then a professor of law, to be the dean, but he refused the offer in favor of holding his cabinet position as the deputy minister of education.

During these years, as an engaged public intellectual, he was committed to raising public awareness and contributing to the education of the youth. He frequently lectured publically about the issues of the day and wrote numerous articles dealing with various relevant issues such as education, legal issues, European politics, Iranian and Islamic history, etc. and also did some translations and composed poetry (see Šāygān, II, pp. 108-113, 223-38, 360-432). His masterwork, however, was *Hoquq-e madani-e Irān* (2 vols., Tehran, 1937), which was praised in numerous reviews and in a letter by Mossadegh. In a review published in the daily paper *Eṭṭelā'āt* (4 Mordād 1317 Š./26 July 1938), the book was described as a source rich in content concerning various legal issues logically composed in clear expressive statements, and was praised for having compared Iranian and Islamic law to the legal system of Western countries (Šāygān, II, pp. 429-32, 463-64).

Šāygān was often invited to deliver lectures on a variety of socially relevant subjects. One of the most notable was the official ceremony marking the installation of the statue of [Ferdowsi](#) at the University of Tehran (1936), and another was delivered in February 1938 on the international situation and politics, in which he explained fascism and the significance of the Italian and German collaboration in European affairs (Šāygān, I, pp. 50-57).

Šāygān met Mossadegh by chance in 1921, while traveling to Tehran from Shiraz (Šāygān, I, p. 43); from then on, their friendship grew and the two men corresponded frequently. Mossadegh's first correspondence with Šāygān is believed to have been the letter in which Mossadegh congratulated and praised him on the publication of his *Hoquq-e madani-e Irān* in 1937 (Šāygān, II, pp. 429-32, 463-64). They remained close friends and political allies to the end of their lives.

In 1946, Šāygān accepted his first political position as deputy minister of

education, at the invitation of his friend, the poet laureate and minister of education **Moḥammad-Taḳi Bahār**. Shortly later, Bahār resigned and the prime minister, Aḥmad Qawām, replaced him with Šāyḡān (Šāyḡān, I, pp. 59-61). One of the first actions of Šāyḡān as minister of education was the implementation of the 1943 Compulsory Education Act (Qānun-e āmuzeš o parvareš-e 'omumi-e ejbāri), which had not yet been implemented (Šāyḡān, I, pp. 63-66). Šāyḡān's advocacy of the issue is clearly stated in his speech on the subject, where he defines and describes compulsory free education law as the essence of social justice (*asās-e 'adālat-e ejtemā'i*; Šāyḡān, I, pp. 63, 66-71).

Šāyḡān resigned as minister of education in 1947, after coming into conflict with the prime minister Qawām (Šāyḡān, I, p. 62). In 1949, he joined the political activities lead by Mossadegh protesting the lack of free election, and he became one of the founding members of the Mossadegh-led National Front and was elected to the sixteenth Majles in 1950. As one of the nineteen founding members of the Front, he helped draft its by-laws and constitution (Abrahimian, pp. 251-54; Šāyḡān, I, pp. 329-39, 349-50). Mossadegh increasingly relied on Šāyḡān throughout the oil nationalization period. He appointed Šāyḡān to the legal team that successfully defended Iran against British claims at the International Court of Justice and also supported his vocal opposition to the government of General Ḥāj-'Ali Razmārā, not to mention his participation in the popular uprising (*qiām*) of 30 Tir 1331 Š. (21 July 1952; Šāyḡān, I, pp. 408-10, 417-25, 449-64; Zabih, pp. 56-66).

After the British loss at the International Court of Justice, Mossadegh turned to Šāyḡān for assistance in the creation of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC; Šerkat-e melli-e naft-e Irān). In a letter of October 1952, Mossadegh asked Šāyḡān to help him draft the by-laws of the newly created company. In another letter written two weeks later, Mossadegh asked for his consultation in selecting the director of the NIOC (Šāyḡān, I, p. 468-69, II, pp. 473-74).

Explaining the British government's attempts to destabilize Mossadegh's government economically and otherwise, many have argued that the British government, lead by the conservative party, had a difficult time accepting its defeat at the international court. The British failed in their efforts at economic sanctions and other pressures aimed at undermining Mossadegh's determination to nationalize the oil industry; they were also unable to secure American support from the outgoing president, Harry S. Truman (Kinzer, p. 3). In 1953, however, after lobbying the new Republican administration under Dwight D. Eisenhower to help them put an end to Mossadegh's government,



they found support from the Dulles brothers who were in charge of the State Department and the CIA and had close connections to the oil industry (Najāti, pp. 377-82; Kinzer, p. 3).

This effort resulted in the now well-known CIA-sponsored [coup d'état of 1953](#) that overthrew the democratically-elected government of Mossadegh. After the coup, Mossadegh was arrested and a military trial sentenced him to house imprisonment. His close associates including Šāygān were also arrested and tried. Šāygān was sentenced to life imprisonment, but, after serving two and a half years in jail, his sentence was reduced on appeal and he was ordered to leave the country (Šāygān, II, pp. 21 ff., 87-91).

Šāygān left Iran in 1956, first going to France, but he eventually, in 1958, settled in the United States in the greater New York area with his wife, Badri Šeybāni, and their four children. In the United States, he continued his opposition to the shah's regime and the United State's intervention in Iran, and he supported the Iranian Student Association in the United States (ISAUS) as it grew into a progressive anti-shah organization in 1960 and unified with other Iranian student associations in Europe to form the famous [Confederation of Iranian Students, National Union](#). At the same time, Šāygān also created a branch of Mossadegh's National Front in the United States (Šāygān, II, pp. 115-18).

While in the United States, Šāygān remained in contact with Mossadegh who was under house arrest until his death in 1967. In a 1962 letter to Šāygān, Mossadegh supported his efforts in the United States to organize the Iranian National Front in Exile (Šāygān, II, p. 483-85). Šāygān's aspirations for a free and democratic Iran continued even when, in the late 1970s, he became ill and frail. This was especially true when anti-shah activities were on the rise in 1977-78. In his message to the people of Iran, 15 August 1977, he praised their struggle for independence and democracy, emphasizing that rights are to be taken and not given, and that attaining their rights implies free elections and freedoms of expression, thought, and assembly. In a 1978 message, he criticized some of the leaders of the National Front in Iran for believing that the shah's regime could be reformed. Throughout 1978, his messages emphasized freedom and democracy (Šāygān, II, pp. 181-84).

In 1978, despite his illness, Šāygān visited Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris, believing at that time that Khomeini also desired democracy for Iran, but severe illness soon forced him to return to New York. Once the shah was

forced to leave Iran in 1979, Šāygān, after two decades of exile, returned to Iran on the first commercial airline to enter the country after the revolution. Upon his arrival, it was rumored that he was seeking the presidency of post-revolutionary Iran in spite of his repeated denials. He also had a brief meeting with Ayatollah Khomeini. He, however, continued speaking out about the need for democracy, tolerance, and freedom of thought and expression. Criticizing the Islamization of the Iranian government, Šāygān emphasized that Iran must not be taken back to the early days of Islam. This angered many clerics who accused him of being a secularist (Šāygān, II, pp. 184-87, 193-94).

The severity of his illness and his desire to seek treatment forced him to go back to the United States in 1980. He died there on 10 May 1981 (Šāygān, II, pp. 211, 220). As he had wished, his body was returned to Iran, where he is buried in Tehran's *Behešt-e Zahrā'* cemetery. Written on his grave are two simple words: *Yār-e Mošaddeq* (Mossadegh's Companion).

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