

ABDOLKARIM SOROUSH



Abdolkarim Soroush was born in Tehran in 1945. Upon finishing high school, Soroush began studying Pharmacy after passing the National Entrance exams of Iran. After completing his degree, he soon left for London in order to continue his studies and to become familiar with the modern world.

It was after graduating in analytical chemistry from graduate school at London that he went to Chelsea College, for studying history and philosophy of science, spending the next five and a half years there. During these years, confrontation between the people and the Shah's regime was gradually becoming more serious, and political gatherings of Iranians in America and Europe, and Britain in particular, were on the increase. Soroush, too, was thus drawn into the field.

After the Revolution, Soroush returned to Iran and there he published his book "Knowledge and Value" (Danesh va Arzesh) the writing of which he had completed in England. He then went to Tehran's Teacher Training College where he was appointed the Director of the newly established Islamic Culture Group.

A year later, all universities were shut down, and a new body was formed by the name of the Cultural Revolution Institute comprising seven members, including Abdolkarim Soroush, all of whom were appointed directly by Ayatollah Khomeini. The purpose of this institute was to bring about the re-opening of the universities and total restructuring of the syllabi.

In 1983, owing to certain differences which emerged between him and the management of the Teacher Training College, he secured a transfer to the Institute for Cultural Research and Studies where he has been serving as a research member of staff until today. He submitted his resignation from membership in the Cultural Revolution Council to Imam Khomeini and has since held no official position within the ruling system of Iran, except occasionally as an advisor to certain government bodies. His principal position has been that of a researcher in the Institute for Cultural Research and Studies.

During the 90s, Soroush gradually became more critical of the political role played by the Iranian clergy. The monthly magazine that he cofounded, Kiyān, soon became the most visible forum ever for religious intellectualism. In this magazine he published his most controversial articles on religious pluralism, hermeneutics, tolerance, clericalism etc. The magazine was clamped down in 1998 among many other magazines and newspapers by the direct order of the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic. About a thousand audio tapes of speeches by Soroush on various social, political, religious and literary subjects delivered all over the world are widely in circulation in Iran and elsewhere. Soon, he not only became subject to harassment and state censorship, but also lost his job and security. His public lectures at Universities in Iran are often disrupted by hardline Ansar-e-Hizbullah vigilante groups.

From the year 2000 onwards Abdolkarim Soroush has been a Visiting Professor in Harvard University teaching Islam and Democracy, Quranic Studies and Philosophy of Islamic Law. Also a scholar in residence in Yale University, he taught Islamic Political Philosophy at Princeton University in the 2002-3 academic year.