

# The Study of Sociopolitical Themes in Dehkhoda's Divan

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**Abstract:** *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution was the result of Iranian people's intellectual growth and development, as well as the advent of idealistic and people-oriented ideas and libertarian movements. Among the backgrounds of such developments are Iranian people's travels abroad for the purpose of education or recreation and their written accounts of their memories and observations. Comparing and contrasting Iran with other countries motivated people to claim their fundamental human rights and strive to achieve freedom. Such ideas spread across the nation by means of newspapers, magazines, and other forms of advertisement and unified people on their path towards achieving freedom, independence, and prosperity for the country. Among others, a certain figure who played a crucial role in the enlightenment of the public is Ali Akbar Dehkhoda. He is a prominent politician, journalist, researchers, and literary figure, and his personality is interesting in each of the mentioned areas. In this thesis entitled "The Study of Sociopolitical Themes in Dehkhoda's Divan," an attempt has been made to study and analyze the social and political themes used by him in his poems. This research encompasses an introduction and three chapters; the first chapter deals with Dehkhoda's biography and the description of his works; the second chapter is concerned with Iran's sociopolitical conditions during his life; and, the third chapter focuses on the sociopolitical themes used in Dehkhoda's poems. The results indicate that sociopolitical themes are the most central ones in his poems. All that Dehkhoda is concerned about are people and the society; it is precisely for this reason that, at times, he deeply sympathizes with people, and on occasions that his passion ebbs away, shows nothing but contempt toward them. Some frequently used themes in his poems are issues such as freedom, homeland, anti-authoritarianism, political party-oriented ideas, and humor and satire. In his view, poetry is not a way of looking at life, but a way towards liberty and equality for his people and the whole humanity.*

**Keywords:** Dehkhoda, Constitution, Politics, Society, Freedom, Homeland, Tyranny

## 1. Introduction

The society is one of the factors influencing one's personality, and it is considered as the primary source of one's psychological characteristics. Familiarity with the lifestyle and ways of the previous generations, social interactions of people, and the views proposed by notable figures and scholars of any given age on social affairs have interested the researchers for a long time. The revered religion of Islam has also encouraged people to deliberate on the lives of the previous generations so as to take lessons from them.

Literary works of the previous generations, especially those of poets, are excellent sources for better understanding the people of that time. By the same token, reflections of social and political issues in the divan of Dehkhoda, a prominent poet of his time, can guide us toward a better understanding of social conditions of that time, and enable us to handle them appropriately. On the other hand, it goes without saying the ethics is of great importance and the survival of a society is hardly possible without ethics. In an Islamic society, whatever that adds to one's proximity to Allah and distances him from immoralities is considered a good deed, and whatever that distance one from Allah is unworthy and improper.

In Islam, good and evil are commonly referred to as Maroof and Munkar. Maroof and Munkar are the pillars of a society. A society is like a ship in which all passenger are expected to keep the shared vessel safe so as to maintain their own safety as well as the safety of the entire passengers. Just as no one should be allowed to dig a hole in the vessel's body

just because it is where he happens to sit, and by doing so perish the lives of others, so no one should be allowed to drive the society toward the verge of degeneration by disregarding the laws and ethics and promoting promiscuity.

Various well-explained sociopolitical dimensions of Dehkhoda's divan for reforming the society are quite unequivocal to any reader.

In this research the attempt has been made to explain and introduce the themes and concerns expressed in the poems of Dehkhoda, as a contemporary poet, by referring to books and printed sources with the help of authorities of the field and inspired by Dehkhoda's poems.

## 2. Ideology and Sociopolitical Views

Dehkhoda, as a thinker, had inherited the ideas of his western and Iranian predecessors, and his ideas were further polished through the course of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. As such, he did not hesitate to question the legitimacy of monarchy, especially in light of Mohammad Ali Shah's misbehavior, his coup against the newly-emerged Constitutionalism, and his dissociation from people and their ideal: democracy. Dehkhoda reflected his political ideas in various issues of Sur Esrafil, which was published in Istanbul. He uses two distinct tones for expressing his views and ideas: a serious tone, and a satirical one.

His satirical articles show his anti-authoritarian position, while his serious articles encompass logical queries; however, even they are influenced by his literary and humorous style which surfaces from time to time. In any

case, Dehkhoda's articles about economy and politics have strong intellectual and scientific foundation, and he resorts to these disciplines for supporting his views. He comprehensively discusses about the nature of monarchy and benefits from the religion and logic for debunking the claims of monarchists about king's divine right to rule. Thus, he refutes the necessity of monarchy both through religion and logic. Dehkhoda believes that the monarchs' divine right to rule comes from nowhere but the feeble-mindedness of ignorant masses in face of the scope of complex incidents in the world. This view of Dehkhoda takes the psychological aspect of political authority into account: people's obedience and their total submission to the majesty of the monarch, the grandeur of his palaces, and the sheer number of servants and armed men at his service. Thus, Dehkhoda introduces the concept of Social Pact into the dynamics of political power; a concept that shows humans will inevitably resort to divine explanations for glorious and grand affairs as long as they are suffering from ignorance, and they cannot simplify their relationship with the monarch to the level of an ordinary social interaction. It was his belief that we all, kings and beggars, are here only for a short stay in the country, and it is only God which is eternal. This country belongs to the posterity; just as we have inherited it from older generation, so we need to pass it down. We should not become hated by contemporaries and our children for a few days of pleasure-seeking. As for the west's understanding about Iran, he wrote: the mentality of Europe has become old and it is still laden with stale ideas about the east. He believed that all foreigners are alike for Iran, and greatly feared the country's blind and thoughtless embracing of foreigners while disregarding the curses uttered by the posterity. As his power of writing and even moving diminished, he little by little surrendered to death. Nevertheless, he did not abandon writing, research and editing until three months prior to his death.

### 3. Poverty

Globalization and the various economic, social, and cultural dimensions of its consequences for countries are among the most controversial issues. More than anything, the third world is worried about the growth of poverty and its inability to compete in the international arena. The economy of such third-world countries are so weak that suspension of protective measures will lead to the deterioration of the national economy. Poverty, famine, and hunger in developing countries have terrible consequences for the world even though at first sight only the people of the said countries are suffering. In any case, one of the major concerns and challenges of developing countries in face of globalization are issues such as the growth of poverty, deterioration of national economy, and their inevitability to accept the terms that make their survival and competition in national commerce and economy virtually impossible. Poverty-stricken countries also suffer from inappropriate finance, value of human resources, and unfavorable crime conditions. As such, poverty is not the same for all societies and under all conditions, and it greatly depends on the social, natural, and cultural conditions of nations.

Poverty can be defined as one's deprivation from material and cultural advantages that hinders one's development and

endangers his or her integrity; in this sense, it can be called absolute poverty. Misery occurs when someone is not even able to feed himself or herself properly. Absolute poverty happens when the individuals or families are even unable to secure their most essential needs and making it to the next day becomes difficult or impossible. Like any other reasonable human being, Dehkhoda admits that poverty is a social disorder. Human values cannot be respected in a poverty-stricken society.

### 4. Conclusion

All great literary works are like mirrors reflecting the social life of their time with all its complexity, vastness, and ambiguity. Artists and literary figures ought to express the sociopolitical conditions of their time as their works encompass the aspirations and demands of the individuals within the society, and artists should promote reasonable dreams and objectives within their works, thus driving people toward perfection. Persian literature, as an invaluable treasure from various ages, has paid special attention to sociopolitical issues. However, sociopolitical issues have become more evident at the time of the constitutional revolution.

Being a learned poet and author, Ali Akbar Dakodahas accepted his responsibility in that critical period, and he has become the voice of his people who were under the pressure of sociocultural problems of the time. All in all, it can be said that Dehkhoda has had a role in directing the society toward betterment and promotion of moral values by highlighting sociocultural issues.

We regard Dehkhoda as a great poet since he has reflected the social conditions of his time with all its hideousness and flaws. The works of Dehkhoda should be evaluated by understanding such hideousness and flaws and the social interactions of his time. Dehkhoda was highly aware of the culture and sociopolitical affairs of his time due to his social and people-oriented personality, his numerous travels, and living in different cities of Iran.

Therefore, it is not surprising that his works are uniquely rich of cultural and social dimensions. Social issues and descriptions of the society of Dehkhoda's time have been reflected in his poetry, and therefore, his poems convey the scope of cruelty, injustice, corruption, and degeneration befalling the society. Many unworthy individuals were in the position of power, and he frequently complains about the situation in his poems. Given the existing social conditions, Dehkhoda was not indifferent to ethical issues, and he has tried to admonish the people in his poems by speaking about moral themes and the terrible conditions of his time.

### 5. Findings of the Present Research Indicate

- 1) Dehkhoda has addressed social and political issues in almost all his poems.
- 2) In his view, tyranny, inadequacy of laws, injustice, corruption and bribery in the government were the most fundamental political problems.
- 3) In his view, illiteracy, unawareness of the conditions among people, superstitions, lack of will and acceptance

of tyranny, poverty, and immorality were the most pressing social problems.

- 4) Dehkhoda regards poverty as a crucial factor that ruins the material and spiritual existence of a society. Heavy taxes adds to the poverty, and since it is not spent for the betterment of the nation, it leads to further economic injustice, on the one hand, and immorality and acceptance of cruelty, on the other hand.
- 5) Dehkhoda was a compassionate and patriotic Iranian and a true faithful Muslim. The intention behind his criticism reproach was the betterment of the society and elimination of problems and difficulties of the people he loved so much and suffered from witnessing their misery. As he needs to speak about unpleasantness and harshness, he has resorted to a satirical tone so as to reduce the bitterness of his criticism.
- 6) It is precisely due to his passion about people that, at times, he seems to sympathize with them, and at other times, he sounds disgusted and frustrated by their acceptance of cruelty and their ignorance.

We owe a lot to Dehkhoda, and others who along with him and through his unique method, willfully used their mind and writing for the betterment of the society and improvement of social and political conditions. They were not easily satisfied with strolling in the delightful gardens of imagination, describing the beauty of the spring and fall, boasting about good wine and the pretty beloved, and live in peace; but, they used the power of their pens to support their lofty ideals which they could have sacrificed their lives for, or given up their posts or wealth because of them. Such great men should be remembered, and their altruism and sacrifice should be appreciated. This research was conducted to study and analyze an example of moral literature.

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