



ČARAND PARAND

ČARAND PARAND (commonly pronounced *Čarand o parand*), literally “fiddle-faddle,” the title of satirical pieces of social and political criticism in the form of short narratives, brief announcements, telegrams, news reports, etc., by ‘Alī-Akbar Dehḡodā (b. 1297/1879, d. 1334 Š./1956) published in the weekly paper *Šūr-e Esrāfīl* (q.v.; Tehran) from 17 Rabī‘ II 1325 to 20 Jomādā I 1326 (30 May 1907-20 June 1908) in 32 issues and again from 1 Moḡarram 1327 to 15 Šafar 1327 (23 January 1909-8 March 1909) in 3 issues of the paper’s new edition prepared by Dehḡodā in Yverdon, Switzerland, and published in Paris, and in the newspaper *Īrān-e konūnī* from the fourth issue on. Some of those in *Īrān-e konūnī* had subtitles, for example, *Yatīmšadkonak* (orphan-pleasing, no. 5), and *Majma‘ al-amṡāl-e Daḡow* (Daḡow’s compendium of proverbs), and were later reprinted in the newspaper *Šafaq-e sork* (nos. 1-5, 7-8, 2-21 Rajab 1340/30 February-21 March 1922).

In *Šūr-e Esrāfīl* Dehḡoda published his articles under the sarcastic pseudonyms of Daḡow, Ḳarmagas, Sag-e Ḥasan Dala, Ğolām Gadā Āzādḡān ‘Alī-Allāhī, Rūznūmačī, Kamīna Asīr-al-Jawāl, Daḡow ‘Alīšāh, Ḳādem-al-Foḡarā’, Daḡow-‘Alī, Ra‘īs-e Anjoman-e Lāt-o-Lūthā, Noḡod-e Hama-āš, Berahna-Ḳvošḡāl, Damdamī, Awyārḡolī, Janāb-e Mollā Aynak-‘Alī. A collection of *Čarand parand* was first published in 1330 Š./1051 by S. Nafīsī (*Šāhḡarhā* I, pp. 20-115). Soon other editions followed, of which the one by Dabīrsīāḡī (*Maḡālāt*, 1358), published with notes and an introduction, is the most complete. It also contains a humorous piece (pp. 273-84), some sketches entitled *Haḡayānhā-ye man* (p. 285), and some notes on Persian proverbs (pp. 286-90), all found after



Dehķodā's death.

Born in Tehran, Dehķodā received ten years of traditional education and then enrolled in the School of Politics (Madrasa-ye Siasī) to study French. After graduating he was employed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and accompanied Mo'āwen-al-Dawla Ğaffārī, Persia's ambassador to the Balkans, where he spent two years, mainly in Vienna. Dehķodā returned to Persia (1323/1905) during the Constitutional movement. He joined the Constitutionalists and a short while later, together with Jahāngīr Khan Šīrāzī and Mīrzā Qāsem Khan Tabrīzī, began publishing the weekly political paper *Šūr-e Esrāfil*, whose satirical articles and biting social criticism were very effective in making people conscious of the problems of the Persian society.

As the editor of the paper Dehķodā wrote editorials, as well as a series of articles, which earned it its wide popularity. In these articles, known as *Čarand parand*, he sharply attacked the corrupt elements of the society. Daķow, Dehķodā's favorite pseudonym, is a dialect form of Dehķodā (village headman) and in folk literature the name of a rather stupid village headman (like Mollā Našr-al-Dīn) from Qazvīn, about whom many silly and funny anecdotes are told.

Before the Constitutional Revolution satire was used in Persian prose and poetry mainly to settle personal scores or to vent feelings of frustration, and it was hardly considered a respectable literary genre. It owes its rise as a literary medium and, at the same time, an effective political weapon to the ingeniousness of poets and writers like [Ašraf Ğilānī](#) and Dehķodā, as well as to the relative freedom of speech created by the Constitutional Revolution. In *Čarand parand* Dehķodā is at his best as a satirist. He shows remarkable talent for discovering the contradictions and ludicrous and funny aspects of the society and then using them to drive his points home in a beautifully made satirical piece. His strong sense of humor, also found in his poetry, was already expressed in the reports he sent to Ğājj Ğosayn Āqā Amīn-al-Žarb in 1324/1906, when he was working for the company Amīn-al-Žarb had established for building a paved road in Khorasan (*Nāmahā-ye siasī*, p. 87). Even in his daily conversation he reportedly often resorted to witty remarks concerning the social conditions of the country (Ādarakšī, p. 11; Dehķodā, *Maqālāt*, p. XXV).

Dehķodā's interest and involvement in contemporary social issues and his deep insight into the mentality of his countrymen, his keen understanding of



their aspirations, problems and frustrations, and his sympathy with them provided him with a wide variety of material for his powerful social satires, in which he analyzed events and aspects of social and political life in Persia and relentlessly attacked any social phenomena that he thought contributed to the country's backwardness: corruption and inefficiency in the government and the Majles, incompetent officials, the government vis-à-vis the people, foreign influence, prevalent injustice and oppression, the threats to freedom of expression, the people's ignorance and their susceptibility to deceit, hypocrisy, corrupt journalists, the deplorable conditions of roads, the chasm between the rich and the poor, superstitions, the lack of education for women, inadequate educational facilities for children, and so on.

Preferring the modes of the spoken language, he shunned the pretentious convoluted style of contemporary men of letters. Using popular idioms he created, 14 years before the publication of Jamāl-zāda's *Yak-ī būd o yak-ī nabūd* (1340/1920), a lively, intimate, and powerful language that makes him a pioneer of modern Persian prose. His style, although it depends heavily on popular vocabulary and manner of expression, is refined, eloquent, and completely free from vulgarisms. Its sentences are short, simple in grammar and syntax, sincere and appealing in tone, and very effective in getting the author's point across. They reflect Dehḵodā's profound knowledge of Persian literature, as well as his extensive familiarity with the popular folklore, epitomized in his *Amtāl o ḥekam* (4 vols., Tehran, 1308 Š./1939, repr. 1339 Š./1960).

It has been suggested that Dehḵodā imitated the format of *Mollā Naṣr-al-Dīn*, a satirical Turkish newspaper published in Caucasia (founded in Tbilisi in 1324/1906) in *Şūr-e Esrāfīl* and that his satirical prose was influenced by the style of the founder and editor of that newspaper, Jalīl Moḥammadqolizāda Naḵjavānī (1869-1932), a Persian by descent. It is argued that the similarity between the two is not confined only to the use of similar topics but is evident also "in the creation of types and characters, the choice of suitable background and environment, the embellishment of the structure of the stories, the development of the content and the arriving at conclusions." Both writers have almost the same style and "in discussing social issues, both of them start with minor and insignificant topics that seem to have no bearing on the point under discussion," or focus on a given issue indirectly through the narration of stories, allegories, or anecdotes or by making humorous and satirical comparisons (Āryanpūr, II, pp. 86-92; Balay, pp. 60-61). The influence of the



humorous and satirical Turkish poet ‘Alī-Akbar Ṭāherzāda Šāber Šervānī (1279-1329/1862-1911), the liberal poet of Caucasia and the author of *Hophop-nāma* (1912), has also been detected in Dehḵodā’s poetry (Āryanpūr, II, pp. 92-97). In view of the fact that Dehḵodā knew Turkish and a close relationship and cooperation existed between the two newspapers *Mollā Naṣr-al-Dīn* and *Šūr-e Esrāfīl* (Āryanpūr, II, p. 86; Dehḵodā, *Dīvān*, pp. 203-08; idem, *Maqālāt*, pp. 265, 267-68), a certain degree of similarity between some of Dehḵodā’s prose and poems published in *Mollā Naṣr-al-Dīn* is to be expected. However, Dehḵodā did not merely imitate, and whatever he borrowed had been completely integrated and recast in the innovative originality of *Āarand parand*, which is so distinctly Persian in letter and spirit. Dehḵodā, through his unique talent and ingeniousness, blended into a solid unity the criticism and satire, popular idioms and proverbs and literary modes of expression, always finding the proper terminology for his subject. When he coined new, eloquent expressions in order to voice his satire they were in perfect compliance with the spirit of the spoken language.

Dehḵodā is probably at his best in *Āarand parand* when it comes to the choice of the kind of subject matter that would most aptly suit his ideas and witticisms, for example the two articles in the form of letters from the town (“Maktūb-e šahrī”): One of the articles is on the biography of Āzād Khan Kerendī and the other on the titles of the nobility (*Maqālāt*, pp. 7-11, 23-26). Other examples are the observations of Awyārḡolī the peasant in the town; “Maktūb-e yak-ī az moḵaddarāt” (A letter from a lady and its reply); the translation of a letter from Arabic; “Amala-ye ḵalwat” (The household servants); “Dorūs al-ašyā” (Lessons about objects); “Maktūb,” a letter criticizing Majles deputies; The Plan for Building a Railroad in Persia (*ibid.*, pp. 32-40, 44-47, 82-86, 92-98, 131-35, 153-58, 181-86). Every character in his stories talks and acts in keeping with the status and disposition suggested by his name. Many points are made by the use of oblique, subtle hints that are often much more eloquent and biting than direct criticism. While seemingly pursuing a line of argument, Dehḵodā manages to draw the reader’s attention to subtle points not directly connected with the main line of his topic. His style is full of allusions and subplots, in such a way that in some of his pieces a number of different topics are intertwined (see, e.g., “Bešārat” Glad-tidings, “Aḵbār-e šahrī” (News from town), and a piece about the threats made against Daḵow and his fear of those threats; *Maqālāt*, pp. 29-30, 58-63, 69-72). Dehḵodā’s masterful manipulation of the subtleties of the language enables him to make biting remarks in countless new ways (e.g., *Maqālāt*, pp. 100-07).



His tendency to expand his theme by using analogous stories leads him at times to the point of being verbose, however.

Giving sarcastic names to the characters of his stories—some of which have already been referred to—is another trademark of his shrewd wit.

It should be added, however, that all of Dehḵodā's criticisms are not in the form of indirect allusions; sometimes they are very clear and direct, especially in the three new issues of *Şūr-e Esrāfīl*, published in Europe. No doubt living outside Persia and the publication of the newspaper in Switzerland gave him greater freedom. It may also be that the unsettled life in exile, frustrations, and the murder of his friend Mīrzā Jahāngīr Khan Şūr-e Esrāfīl also played a role in giving a more direct and vehement tone to his criticism and making his satirical pieces more incisive and even caustic.

The question of whether Dehḵodā's *Čarand parand* is in the form of a story (récit), anecdote, or novelette, and also the purpose of the introductions (*moqaddama*), and the format and the construction of the stories, also the relationship between the introduction and the main themes of the story, play with words and phrases, which connects the various parts of a given piece and the variety of means he uses to effect this connection of side events with each other and with the main theme, the fast pace of the dialogues, the interaction of characters in some stories (e.g., *Maqālāt*, pp. 58-63), the dramatic forms of some of the narratives, the unraveling of the main points, and many other technical details have been discussed in detail in the valuable, critical study of Balay (pp. 51-105). Balay has evaluated *Čarand parand* mainly by applying Western standards of criticism, and while stressing Dehḵodā's originality he has also regarded the narrative style of *Čarand parand* as having been influenced by Dehḵodā's exposure to Western literature, and as occupying a place halfway between traditional literature and the literature based on Western models (pp. 100-01, 105). This point is only partly valid, however.

In any case, Dehḵodā in *Čarand parand* is, undoubtedly, one of the ablest and cleverest satirists in the Persian language. The strong reaction of the opponents of the newspaper *Şūr-e Esrāfīl*, which eventually led to Dehḵodā's banishment (Browne, *Persian Revolution*, p. 264; *Maqālāt*, pp. x-xi) show the effectiveness of his articles and their literary, political, and social significance (Ī. Afšār in *Āyanda*, p. 530). Despite their brevity and satirical tone, one can see in them, narrated in a most delightful style, the critical representation of many crucial social and political issues of Persia at the beginning of the 14th/20th



century.

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