

Critical Review of 'Being a Child of One's Time' in Three Peaks of Contemporary Persian Poetry (Sohrab Sepehri, Ahmad Shamlou, and Mehdi Akhavan Sales)

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Given the distinctiveness of the poetry and poets' realm in the contemporary era and the knowledge and ability of the people of the time, talking about being of one's time, especially for poets considering the fear and despair cast upon society due to the turbulence, was challenging. However, how one speaks with indifference and silence makes a difference—with the scholarly or malicious criticisms about Sohrab Sepehri and Shamlou, assuming that one spoke with fiery words. At the same time, the other was lost in the greenery and freshness of nature. In this research, we aim to examine the issue of humanism and being a child of one's time, considering the sub-components of the contemporary poet. Since the two sides of this research were either excessive or neglectful, we endeavored to create a bridge between them to make this disparity somewhat uniform. We preferred the third side of this research to be Akhavan Sales. Therefore, in this study, we have pursued the critique and analysis of the components of being a child of one's time in the poetry of Sohrab, Shamlou, and Akhavan and reached a comparative conclusion.

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Introduction

The concept of “being a child of one’s time” (*farzand-e zaman-e khishtan*) is not merely a modern sociological construct but has deep roots in Islamic and religious traditions, denoting an individual who is time-conscious, active, socially committed, and possesses the foresight to navigate historical challenges. In contemporary Persian poetry, the engagement of poets with their socio-political milieu has been subject to intense scrutiny. This study investigates the manifestation of this concept in the works of three major figures: Ahmad Shamlou, Sohrab Sepehri, and Mehdi Akhavan Sales. While Shamlou is often characterized by a fiery, overtly political “humanism” and Sepehri by an immersion in nature that occasionally appears indifferent to worldly suffering, Akhavan Sales stands as an intermediate figure, bridging classical Khorasani aesthetics with modern social realism. This research seeks to bridge the critical gap between these disparate poetic identities, analyzing whether—and how—each poet embodies the responsibilities of their time.

Method

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodology. By conducting a content analysis of the selected poetic corpora, the study evaluates the presence and frequency of themes related to “being a child of one’s time,” such as social commitment, humanism, political awareness, and empathy for the suffering of the masses. The study categorizes the three poets into a conceptual hierarchy: Shamlou as the pole of “excess” (in social-political engagement), Sepehri as the pole of “deficiency” (in terms of explicit social activism), and Akhavan Sales as the synthesizing “intermediate” pole. The methodology relies on textual evidence, juxtaposing the poets’ thematic concerns against the historical realities of their era.

Results

The comparative analysis reveals that while the three poets approached their reality differently, each significantly engaged with their time:

- **Ahmad Shamlou (The Pole of Social-Political Protest):** Shamlou is identified as a poet whose “humanism” is the focal point of his work. His poetry serves as a conscience for the society, often utilizing the rhyme of “blood” and “human.” He is presented

as a poet who actively translates social pain into poetic struggle, rejecting silence and advocating for freedom and justice. His work is characterized by a “global” vision, where the concern for humanity transcends local boundaries.

- **Sohrab Sepehri (The Pole of Nature and Spirituality):** Sepehri represents a different paradigm. His deep, almost total, immersion in nature often distances him from overt political activism, leading to the perception of “indifference.” However, the analysis shows that he is not truly detached; rather, his method of “being a child of his time” is rooted in his unique spiritual and artistic philosophy. He seeks to heal the human condition through nature, simplicity, and a universal, albeit abstract, empathy.
- **Mehdi Akhavan Sales (The Intermediate Pole):** Akhavan Sales serves as the bridge between the two. He blends classical elements (Khorasani style) with contemporary political and social concerns. Unlike Sepehri, he is deeply engaged with the aftermath of historical traumas (such as the 1953 coup), and unlike Shamlou, his engagement is often filtered through a more traditional, epic, and realistic lens. He links the past to the future and is capable of both intense nature-observation and bitter socio-political critique.

Conclusion

The study concludes that all three poets are indisputably “children of their time,” despite their differing thematic vehicles. The research demonstrates that “being a child of one’s time” is not restricted to overt political activism; it can also be manifested through artistic innovation, spiritual engagement, and the honest portrayal of social reality. While the statistical frequency of explicitly social-political themes is higher in the poetry of Shamlou and Akhavan Sales, Sepehri’s contribution lies in his unique, contemplative response to the crisis of modernity. Ultimately, the study confirms that the poet’s primary duty—to be a voice for their society—is fulfilled by each of these figures through their distinct and necessary aesthetic modes.