The Satirical Verse of Akbar Ilāhābādī (1846-1921)

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# *The Satirical Verse of Akbar Ilāhābādī (1846–1921)*

RALPH RUSSELL and KHURSHIDUL ISLAM

AKBAR Ilāhābādī—Akbar of Allahabad— has been the victim of much injustice at the hands of scholars, both in the West and in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent that was his homeland.[1] The reason is a simple one. Akbar's fame is based—and quite properly based—upon his humorous verse; and scholars tend to be rather solemn people who may enjoy reading humorous verse in the brief periods of recreation which they allow themselves, but to whom the thought simply does not occur that a man may express in humorous verse ideas just as significant, and basically just as serious, as, let us say, a man who writes a voluminous commentary on holy writ. Akbar was such a poet. Indeed in one of his verses he tells us as much:[2]

سرد موسم تھا ہوائیں چل رہی تھیں برفبار  شاہدِ معنی نے اوڑھا ہے ظرافت کا لحاف

which may be translated:

It was the winter: icy winds were blowing cold;
My meaning's beauty wrapped itself in humour's cloak.

Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam have worked together in the way described in the author's Preface to *Three Mughal Poets* (Harvard University Press, 1968, and Allen & Unwin, London, 1969). Khurshidul Islam read the whole of the four volumes of Akbar's *Kulliyāt*, and made a comprehensive selection, which they then studied and discussed together. The English text of the article is Ralph Russell's and is an expanded version of a lecture which he gave at the Oriental Centre, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, on 30 November 1971; but it represents the views of both the authors.

[1] A full study of Akbar is long overdue, and a good deal of material for such a study is available in the various collections of his letters and the reminiscences of him by, among others, 'Abdul Mājid Daryābādī, Khwāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī, Ṭālib Ilāhābādī, and Qamar ud Dīn Aḥmad. The present article deals only with his topical verse, and excludes the bulk of his ghazal poetry; this too would repay serious study. Akbar, like his older contemporary Ḥālī, is one of those poets whose achievement in the ghazal has been overshadowed by the greater popularity of their other verse.

[2] *Kulliyāt*, Part III, no. 1064. The editing of the *Kulliyāt* leaves much to be desired. Some attempt at dating has been made in Part I, but only within very broad limits. In general, all four parts seem to include verse of all periods, Parts II and III being, in effect, substantial supplements to Part I, presenting verse that had been missed

It follows that Akbar deserves much more serious attention than he has hitherto been accorded.

In order that Akbar may be adequately understood it is first necessary to outline the historical experience of the Muslims in India, experience to which Akbar and his generation were heir.

The Muslim impact on India dates from about A.D. 1200—or rather, to be more accurate, it is from about that date that Muslim influence began to be continuously exerted, for centuries together, upon India as a whole. For the greater part of five centuries from that date Muslim dynasties dominated the North of the subcontinent, extended into the central plateau, and, on occasion, penetrated far into the South. The period of their greatest glory is, by general consent, the one hundred and fifty years which span the reigns of the last five Mughal emperors, from Akbar (the namesake of our poet), who came to the throne in 1556, to Aurangzeb, who died in 1707. Muslims were throughout this period, as they have always been, only a minority of the subcontinent's population—a large and powerful minority, but a minority nevertheless. They were always aware of their minority position and, in that awareness, all the more proud of the fact that they, the Muslim minority, dominated the course of Indian history. The Muslim community felt itself to be the élite of the Indian population, ruling the land by virtue of the special qualities which God in his special grace had bestowed upon them, and thus vindicating their claims for the superiority of Islam.

It is not difficult to envisage, then, the heart-searchings that began in the Muslim community when after Aurangzeb's death the Mughal Empire went into a period of precipitate, catastrophic decline. There is no need to trace the course of that decline even in general outline. Percival Spear, in a much quoted passage, has described the changes that it brought to Delhi, the imperial capital. He writes:

Two hundred years ago Delhi had been a great and imperial city for a century, with anything between one and two million inhabitants. It was the largest and most renowned city, not only of India, but of all the East from Constantinople to Canton. Its court was brilliant, its mosques and colleges numerous, and its literary and artistic fame as high as its political renown.

when Part I was compiled. Part IV, however, seems to comprise mainly the verse of Akbar's last years. It is possible that some of the verses included were not published during his life-time, but, if so, this is not indicated. The footnotes are quite often incorrect. In Parts I and III, the poems are numbered: in Parts II and IV they are not. References are given thus: II, 54, 3 means Part II, page 54, line 3, and references to Part IV are given in the same way. But I, 70, 4 means Part I, number 70 (not page 70) line 4; and similarly with Part III.

Within fifty years its provinces vanished, its wealth was plundered, its Emperor was blinded, and the city shrank to be a provincial capital of less than two hundred thousand people.[3]

The same period saw the emergence of the British as the force that was to oust the Muslims for ever from dominance in the subcontinent. The Muslims did not know that at the time. It was perhaps not until the end of the eighteenth century that it became clear to them that the British were not just another one of the many forces that contended for power among the ruins of the Mughal Empire, but *the* enemy, the power destined to seize and to subjugate, more thoroughly than any previous power, the whole of the subcontinent.

Up to that time the Muslims had been acutely aware of their decline, and had given much thought to the causes of it. But such conclusions as they had reached had not developed a very sharp anti-British edge. All trends looked back to the past for inspiration. Some sought to revive the policies of Akbar's day—the period when, amongst other things, great efforts were made by the predominantly Muslim ruling élite to diminish hostility and cultivate positive harmony between the Muslims and the great Hindu majority of the Empire's subjects. Others, more explicitly religious in their outlook, and continuing a trend already well in evidence in Akbar's own time, explained the decline as the end result of a long lapse from the true, strict principles of Islam, in which the pernicious influence of the Hindu environment had played a major part. On the political plane, many of those who reasoned in this way looked for help in restoring the true Islam, and the political dominance that should go with it, to the Afghan king Shāh Abdālī, who, over a period of about twenty years in the middle of the eighteenth century repeatedly invaded India and dictated the policies of what was left of the Empire.

As the nineteenth century began, and the British emerged as the one serious contender for all-India dominance, Muslim thought developed the sharp anti-British edge that it had hitherto lacked. If Muslim ascendancy was to be restored, it was above all the power of the British that had to be destroyed. Anti-British feeling grew rapidly, and reached its culminating point in the great revolt of 1857. The revolt was sparked off by a mutiny of the sepoys—i.e. of the Indian soldiers serving in the armies of the British East India Company—and quickly involved other sections of the population, especially in Delhi and what is now the state of U.P.—Uttar Pradesh—the traditional centres of strength of the old Muslim ruling élite. Its initial successes did not last longer than a few

[3] Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls*, Cambridge University Press, 1951, p. 1.

months, but the rebel forces held Delhi from May to September, and the Mughal Emperor, hitherto for many years a mere pensioner of the British, was compelled to put himself at its head. And though the British re-took Delhi in September 1857, and increasingly re-established their control during 1858, it was not until 1859 that the revolt could be regarded as finally crushed.

The role of the traditional Muslim élite in this struggle was not as simple as the modern description of it as 'the War of Independence' might suggest. Some sections of them were, unlike most of their fellow-Muslims, admirers of the British, and supported them throughout. Much larger numbers did not indeed admire the British, but they were well enough aware of their strength to consider revolt against them doomed to failure; and these did their best to keep clear, taking sides only if and when pressure of circumstances made it almost impossible to do otherwise. And only a few wholeheartedly identified themselves with the revolt. Moreover the struggle was not a national struggle in the sense which modern European history, and contemporary Asian, African and Latin American history, have given to the words—not, in other words, a struggle in which a new, coherent, almost mystic sense of a common nationality welded and inspired the forces of revolt, and those who opposed it were regarded as traitors to their people. One can speculate (if one likes speculating) on what would in fact have happened had the revolt succeeded, but there is no doubt that it consciously aimed at the restoration of the old Mughal Empire, that is, of a feudal type of society ruled by its traditional élite. That élite naturally determined its course of action in the revolt by a calculation of its own interests, and showed a sense of solidarity which continued before, during and after the revolt, regardless of the differing roles which its members played in it. The more plebeian element, though well aware of the lukewarmness of its upper-crust allies, regarded the traditional élite as its natural superiors, and the obvious rulers in the régime which would have replaced the defeated British power. The revolt therefore did not produce a great gulf within the Muslim community. The common aims and assumptions of all of its members always had been, and were long to remain, more important than the differences over strategies and tactics which had divided them and which had prescribed different courses of action during the revolt. There were no bitter mutual recriminations after the final, decisive defeat. The aims of the community remained the same—the regeneration of Islam, and the recovery of an élite position in the subcontinent.

But in pursuit of these still common aims, new and far-reaching

changes in Muslim attitudes now came into being. There were indeed those among them who emerged from the struggle with heads, so to speak, bloody but unbowed. They recognized—as who could fail to recognize?—that British power was firm and unassailable for many, many years to come, and drew the conclusion that for the present the task was to abandon a hopeless political contest, to cherish the true spirit of Islam, to educate in that spirit all the members of the Muslim community who sought such education, and so keep their spiritual powder dry for some future day when the worldly prospects of Indian Islam would again improve and a return to the political field of battle would be practicable and desirable. The great centre for Muslims of this school was the theological seminary, which still flourishes, at Deoband, in north-western U.P.

At the other end of the scale was a group dominated by the outstanding figure of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, later to become *Sir* Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and now generally known simply as 'Sir Sayyid' both to Indian and to Pakistani Muslims. He came from an old aristocratic family, which had been close both to the Mughal court and to influential British figures long before the 1857 revolt. He had himself entered British service and during the revolt had, with considerable courage, stood unswervingly on the British side, regarding the uprising as an act of folly for which his community would have to pay dearly.

A man of immense energy and determination, he took stock of the situation after the defeat and evolved the policies which for the remaining forty years of his life he pursued consistently. The logic of his position could be stated like this: Muslim ascendancy was gone for ever, and only in one way could the traditional Muslim élite hope to restore its fortunes: by complete identification with the aims and outlook of the new, unchallengeable British rulers of India—an identification which would make it, in effect, the junior partner in a ruling British-Muslim alliance.[4] This was to be achieved first by dissociation from all political activity not approved by the British; secondly, by education to implant the values of Victorian England in the minds of the educated, articulate sections of the Muslim community; and thirdly, by a reinterpretation of Islam along modern lines. It may be imagined that the more alert among the British saw the favourable implications for them of this response, and reacted accordingly. Macaulay, in his famous Minute on Indian Education of 1835 had expressed his aims for British

[4] The old Mughal aristocracy would thus stand in the same relation to the British (though I do not think Sir Sayyid would have drawn this parallel) as the old Rajput aristocracy had stood to the Mughals in the days of the Empire's prime.

rule in India in these words: 'We must . . . do our best to form . . . a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.'[5] Sir Sayyid, writing in 1882, summarized his aims thus: 'to produce a class of persons, Muslim in religion, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, and in intellect.'[6] The resemblance to Macaulay's words is both obvious and striking. He saw as the main instrument of this purpose the college —The Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College, or M.A.O. College—at Aligarh, which is today the Aligarh Muslim University.

Having determined what he thought was the proper aim for his community, Sir Sayyid commenced with an all-pervading zeal to remould his fellow-Muslims' thought along the lines most likely to help in achieving that aim. Many of those who know of him today as the pioneer of modern thought in his community would I think be startled and shocked at the crude and aggressive vigour which his speeches and writings reveal. He told his fellow-Muslims, in words which in the days of the Raj British writers used to quote, with perhaps a rather malicious glee, but which in our own more tactful and (in this area at least) more hypocritical age are rarely referred to, that 'The natives of India, high and low, . . . educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners, and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man.' He certainly went all out in his efforts to arouse in them the spirit necessary to transform this deplorable state of affairs, arguing against every traditional Muslim belief, idea and prejudice which stood as an obstacle in the way of reconciliation and harmony between the Muslims and their new British rulers. Islam correctly interpreted, he argued, led directly to the modern outlook of which, by the accidents of history, the British were now the spokesmen. There was, and could be, no contradiction between the teachings of the Quran and the teachings of modern science. There was a real and natural identity of interests between the British and the Muslims, and once misunderstandings on both sides were removed, this natural identity of interest would assert itself.

Sir Sayyid was often quite unscrupulous in his arguments, suppressing

[5] *Macaulay's Speeches*, a selection, ed. G. M. Young, Oxford University Press. World's Classics ed., 1935, p. 359.

[6] Quoted (in Urdu) in *Addresses and Speeches Relating to the Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh, . . . 1875–1898*, [ed.] by Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Institute Press, Aligarh, 1898, *Tamhīd*, pp. 1, 2.

[7] Urdu text in *Musāfirān i Landan*, ed. Shaikh Muḥammad Ismā'īl Pānipatī, Majlis i Taraqqī i Adab, Lahore, 1961, pp. 183–4. English translation quoted from G. F. I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, K.C.S.I.*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1909 ed., pp. 125–6.

things that were inconvenient to his case and highlighting—even inventing—things that supported it. Thus in a speech of 1884, he not only declared that the Muslims prayed that British rule in India might last for ever, but added unblushingly that the Muslims had always been on the British side and in fact had helped them to establish their rule.[8] No matter was too small for his attention. He argued that Islam permitted Muslims to dine with the English, that the English practice of killing a chicken by wringing its neck was permitted by Islam, and that the unbecoming English habit of urinating from a standing position was not forbidden by the Muslim religion.[9]

Such was the pro-British zeal which, by the time Akbar came upon the scene, had made the Aligarh movement of Sir Sayyid and his supporters a major trend among the Muslims of the age.

### *Akbar's view of British rule*

Akbar's view of British rule was a very different one from that which Sir Sayyid held (or more accurately perhaps, that which he thought it politic to *declare* that he held). Both men are agreed that British power is supreme and, for the foreseeable future, unshakeable. But where Sir Sayyid sees in this the creation of conditions in which a natural identity of British and Muslim interests would assert itself, the guarantee of progress, and the hope of ever closer association between ruler and ruled, Akbar ridicules the idea. In more than one verse he quotes with approval the homely Indian peasant equivalent of the sentiment that 'might is right'— جس کی لاٹھی اس کی بھینس — 'he who wields the big stick owns the buffalo'—with its implication not only that the British ruled because no one else was strong enough to challenge them, but also that they ruled in their own interest, and not with any nobler aim in mind. To Sir Sayyid's talk of 'progress' and 'association' he replies bluntly:[10]

کیسی ترقی کیسا میل ہم سے سُن لو اس کا کھیل
جس کی لاٹھی اس کی بھینس فعلؔ فعلؔ فعلؔ فعلؔ

[8] *Addresses and Speeches* (cf. note 6), pp. 74–81.

[9] Sayyid Ṭufail Aḥmad, *Musalmānoṅ kā Raushan Mustaqbil*, 5th ed., Delhi, 1945, p. 207.

[10] I, 1076, and cf. (e.g.) III, 1242, 1 and 1061, 3.

(The last line is meaningless, and simply exemplifies the beat of the metre.) I translate the verse:

> What do you mean? 'Progress', 'Association'—
> Listen to me, *I*'ll tell you how it's done.
> '*He* owns the buffalo who wields the cudgel.'
> Ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum.

—"ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum ti-tum"—or, in other words, if you want another line to complete the piece, you can have one—but really once you have said '*He* owns the buffalo who wields the cudgel', there's nothing more to *be* said.

Akbar doesn't want to varnish reality in any way. The British rule India because they have the *power* to do so, and not for any other reason, and that is no reason for an Indian to rejoice, and still less for an Indian Muslim to rejoice. He doesn't forget, and doesn't *want* to forget, what the establishment of unchallengeable British power has meant to his country, and what are the penalties of defeat:[11]

جو گزروگے ادھر سے میرا اُجڑا گاؤں دیکھوگے  شکستہ ایک مسجد ہے بغل میں گورا بارک ہے

> If you should pass that way you'll see my ravaged village:
> A Tommies' barracks standing by a ruined mosque

—the Tommies' barracks the symbol of British power, and the ruined mosque the symbol of Muslim defeat.

The themes of the all-pervading power of the British and of the irreversible changes they have wrought occur again and again in his verse. A whole poem of nine couplets has the recurring rhyme

ان کے ہاتھ میں —'in their hand' or 'in their grasp, in their control'. A rather literal, and slightly abridged, translation of some of its lines[12] will give some idea of the recurring, heavy force of this refrain.

تخت کے قابض وہی دیہیم ان کے ہاتھ میں  ملک ان کا رزق کی تقسیم اُن کے ہاتھ میں

آگیا تا راِمید و بیم اُن کے ہاتھ میں  .....

سب کی ہے تذلیل اور تعظیم اُن کے ہاتھ میں  .....

قوم ان کے ہاتھ میں تسلیم اُن کے ہاتھ میں  .....

مغرب ایسا ہی رہا اور ہے اگر مشرق یہی  ایک دِن دیکھیں گے ہفت اقلیم ان کے ہاتھ میں

[11] II, 48, 4.  [12] I, 125, couplets 1, 2, 4, 6, and 9. Cf. also (e.g.) IV, 30, 4.

They hold the throne in their hand. The whole realm is in their hand. The country, the apportioning of men's livelihood, is in their hand . . . The springs of hope and of fear are in their hand. . . . In their hand is the power to decide who shall be humbled and who exalted. . . . Our people is in their hand, education is in their hand. . . . If the West continues to be what it is, and the East what *it* is, we shall see the day when the whole world is in their hand.

Another complete poem expresses the sense of living in a new world, in which everything has changed.[13]

وہ مطرب اور وہ ساز وہ گانا بدل گیا  نیندیں بدل گئیں وہ فسانہ بدل گیا
رنگِ رُخِ بہار کی زینت ہوئی نئی  گلشن میں بلبلوں کا ترانہ بدل گیا
فطرت کے ہر اثر میں ہوا ایک انقلاب  پانی فلک پہ کھیت میں دانہ بدل گیا

The minstrel, and the music, and the melody have all changed. Our very sleep has changed; the tale we used to hear is no longer told. Spring comes with new adornments; the nightingales in the garden sing a different song. Nature's every effect has undergone a revolution. Another kind of rain falls from the sky; another kind of grain grows in the fields.

What, in more concrete terms, these changes are, he will tell us in other poems. The British themselves, he notes sardonically, tend to be reticent about them. He reflects bitterly how often the British accuse the Muslims—(and the accusation is still a familiar one in the West)—of having spread their religion by the sword. Even if that were true, Akbar tells them, the force *we* used cannot compare with the force *you* have used. And if we spread Islam, we brought to our subjects a faith which inspired those who embraced it with a new dignity and a new purpose in life. And what have *you* brought *your* subjects?

یہی فرماتے رہے تیغ سے پھیلا اسلام
یہ نہ ارشاد ہوا توپ سے کیا پھیلا ہے

You never ceased proclaiming that Islam spread by the sword:
You have not deigned to tell us what it is the gun has spread.[14]

Akbar has no inhibitions about saying 'what it is the gun has spread'. First, it has founded a régime which regards India simply as a land stocked with goods destined for Europe. If Muslims think of India as a

[13] I, 35. [14] III, 578, 2.

land of Islam they are wrong; if Hindus think of it as the land of their mythical heroes, Lakṣman and Ram, they are deceived. India is merely Europe's warehouse, populated by loyal subjects of the British Raj.[15]

یہ بات غلط کہ ملک اسلام ہے ہند　　یہ جھوٹ کہ ملکِ لچھمن و رام ہے ہند
ہم سب ہیں مطیع و خیر خواہِ انگلش　　یورپ کے لئے بس ایک گودام ہے ہند

Those who support British ideas and values speak of them as the 'New Light' which brings *tahz̲īb* or 'refinement' to those who embrace it. Sir Sayyid's influential periodical was called *Tahz̲īb ul Akh̲lāq*—'the Refinement of Manners'—'manners' in the broader and more significant sense of the term. But Akbar cannot see how the light which only shows men how to exploit others can shed 'the radiance of refinement'; nor will he give the name of human progress to the process which ruins a thousand men to advance the interests of a hundred.[16]

جس روشنی میں لوٹ ہی کی آپ کو سوجھے　　تہذیب کی میں اس کو تجلّی نہ کہوں گا
لاکھوں کو مٹا کر جو ہزاروں کو ابھارے　　اس کو تو میں دنیا کی ترقی نہ کہوں گا

The light that only lights the path to plunder
I will not call 'refinement's radiance'.
You ruin thousands to promote a hundred:
I'll not call that 'humanity's advance'.

Not that he is always so grimly serious about it. In one verse[17] he contemplates the plight of the once well-to-do Muslim, deprived by the new régime of his former wealth, debarred by its puritanism from his former pleasures, and compelled by its new laws to give up his gun unless they grant him a licence to own one.

لذّت چاہو تو وصلِ معشوق کہاں　　شوکت چاہو تو زر کا صندوق کہاں
کہتا ہے یہ دِل کہ خودکشی کی ٹھہرے　　خیر اس کو بھی مان لیں تو بندوق کہاں

You have no gold: how can you live in style?
You have no mistress: how can you have fun?
And if you want to end it all—alright—
But then how can you when you have no gun?

[15] I, 868. He makes a similar point in III, 1357, about Englishmen who go home to England when they retire instead of staying on in India.
[16] I, 53.　　[17] I, 1099.

In another verse[18] he contrasts the period of Muslim rule with that of the British. Its force depends on untranslatable plays upon words:

پہلے توحید تھی تو اب تحصیل  آگے غل ایک کا تھا اب دو کا

*Tauḥīd*—insistence upon the unity, the oneness, of God is contrasted with *taḥṣīl*—the process of getting something from someone. The two words are parallel formations from two Arabic roots, and are identical in metrical weight. In the second half of the couplet there is a play on *ek*, which means 'one', and *do* which means 'two'—but also means 'give'. ' "In our day," says Akbar, the stress was on God's *tauḥīd*—unity, and the cry was *ek*!—"one!" In their day the stress is on *taḥṣīl*—extraction of wealth—and the cry is *do*!—meaning not "two" (although the word *can* mean that) but "Give!" '

The British established their rule by force, but they do not depend simply on force to maintain it. Unlike us, says Akbar[19]

مشرقی تو سرِ دشمن کو کچل دیتے ہیں  مغربی اس کی طبیعت کو بدل دیتے ہیں

We of the East break our opponents' heads
They of the West change their opponents' nature.

And perhaps their most effective weapon in this process is their system of education. First comes the gun, to break armed resistance, and then education to induce acceptance of the new order.[20]

توپ کھسکی پروفیسر پہونچے  جب بسولا ہٹا تو رندا ہے

The guns have gone, and now come the professors.
The adze has done its work; now comes the plane.

They are bent on destroying us, but take steps to see that we don't feel it.[21]

قتل سے پہلے ہے کلوراف ام
شکر ہے اُن کی مہربانی کا

Before they murder us they chloroform us.
We ought to render thanks that they are kind.

[18] I, 1037, 2.
[19] I, 124, 1.
[20] III, 580.
[21] I, 54, 10.

The fact that there are ways in which Indians can benefit from the education which the British offer—and Akbar, as we shall see later, does not deny this—does not alter the fact that it was to serve their own interests and not their subjects' interests, that the British introduced it. Akbar stresses its limitations in a whole poem leading up to the concluding couplet:[22]

تعلیم جو دی جاتی ہے ہمیں وہ کیا ہے فقط بازاری ہے
جو عقل سکھائی جاتی ہے وہ کیا ہے فقط سرکاری ہے

They give us learning—just enough for us to sell our services
And understanding—just enough for governmental purposes.

In fact, as he says in another verse:[23]

جس کے لائق تھی جو چیز اس کو ملی ہے خدا ہی کی طرف سے ہر اک کا سورس
ان کا پاکٹ اور پیداوار ملک حافظہ بندے کا اور کالج کا کورس

All things receive the things most fitted to them
God's will alone determines every source
Their pocket holds the produce of our country
Your servant's memory holds the college course.

Along with education go other devices to reconcile you to your lot, like the pomp and splendour of durbars and other ceremonies of state. Akbar remarks rather sourly how kind it is of King George the Fifth, who besides being King of Great Britain, is also Emperor of India, to put himself out to spend ten whole days there.[24]

لندن سے دہلی آئے ہیں دس یوم کے لئے یہ زحمتیں اٹھائیں فقط قوم کے لئے

One of his most famous longer poems describes an earlier durbar—the Delhi durbar of 1903.[25] At one point, after describing all the entrancing sights that meet his eyes he sums it all up in the words:[26]

آنکھیں میری باقی اُن کا

My eyes are mine; the rest is theirs.

[22] III, 1402. [23] IV, 97, 1–2. [24] II, 90, last line.
[25] I, 593. [26] Line 34.

And he imagines another Indian talking to him[27]

پہننے کو تو کپڑے ہی نہ تھے کیا بزم میں جاتے  خوشی گھر بیٹھے کر لی ہم نے جشنِ تاج پوشی کی

We had no clothes—how could we go to see the celebrations?
We had to stay at home to celebrate the coronation.

Anyway, the whole thing is a lot of fuss about nothing. The rush and bustle of preparation remind you of the tumult of Judgment Day. But, he says.[28]

ہنگامۂ محشر کا تو مقصود ہے معلوم  دہلی میں یہ دربار ہے معلوم نہیں کیوں

The tumult of the Day of Judgment has some purpose to it.
But this durbar in Delhi now—what is *that* all about?

And in another verse[29] where, as often, he presses home an oft-repeated lesson with a neat topical reference, he calls upon his readers to see with what splendour the stars shine in the heavens, how God is an Emperor whose rule their illuminations celebrate every night, with a show that never fails to entrance you—and to which the angels admit everyone free, without ticket.

فلک پر شان و عظمت سے ستارے جگمگاتے ہیں  خدا کی سلطنت کی جوبلی ہر شب مناتے ہیں
یہی نظارہ ہم کو محو رکھتا ہے سدا اکبر  فرشتے بے ٹکٹ یہ منظرِ اعظم دکھاتے ہیں

Finally there is the sham—as Akbar thinks it—of consultation with the representatives of native opinion, membership of advisory councils, and so on. These are a sham because the British in any case can, and do, act as they please—those who rule the country rule the councils, says Akbar[30]

کونسل تو ہے اُن کی ہی جن کا ہے راج

—and the councils' only object is to enable publicity-seeking Indians to make a show and to keep them happy with the illusion that they are in some degree controlling their own destinies. That, says Akbar,

[27] I, 179, 4.
[28] I, 115, 3.
[29] II, 79, 13–14.
[30] III, 1218, 6.

is like judging the ways of English women by the ways of Indian women.[31]

وصل کا اُس بُتِ خود بیں سے کوئی ہنٹ کہاں  صرف بوسے میں بھلا سلف گورمنٹ کہاں

Don't think it means the lady's going to sleep with you.
A mere kiss doesn't mean self-government.

Akbar would be more convinced of the benevolence of British rule if it produced an increase in the general well-being. What the British are doing is like giving medicine to a man who above all needs food.[32]

دوا ہے کالج اور کونسل سو اس کی ہے فراوانی
غذا ہے (راحتِ دل اور دولت) وہ بہت کم ہے

The medicines of colleges and councils flow abundantly.
The food—of peace and plenty—is in very short supply.

To 'honour' an Indian by making him a member of a council is like putting rouge on the cheeks of a starving woman.[33]

عزت ملی ہے شرکتِ کونسل کی شیخ کو
غازہ ملا گیا ہے رُخِ فاقہ مست پر

And all the council's busy activities result in nothing substantial.[34]

رزولیوشن کی شورش ہے مگر اس کا اثر غائب
پلیٹوں کی سدا سنتا ہوں اور کھانا نہیں آتا

Their resolutions make a din, but nothing ever comes of them
I hear the clatter of the plates, but dinner never comes.

The real nature of British rule becomes clear when you note the way in which British officials treat their Indian fellow-subjects of the Crown. Akbar, here again, ridicules the more gullible of his fellow-countrymen, who think that solemn official proclamations mean what they say:[35]

کاغذ پہ اعتراف مگر دل میں کچھ نہیں

On paper they respect you; in their hearts they don't.

[31] III, 1333. [32] I, 245, 2 and cf. I, 534, 2. [33] I, 74, 2.
[34] III, 28, 1. [35] II, 91, 10.

When Indians speak of themselves and the British as 'We' the British laugh at them. He tells them:[36]

کہتے ہو تم جو "ہم" تو انھیں آتی ہے ہنسی  یعنی زبانِ شوق غلط لفظ میں پھنسی

When you say 'We' it only makes them laugh.
Your fervour brings the wrong words to your tongue.

What the British want are men who listen, not men who speak, even to ask questions, much less to form judgments. Many lines, delivered, so to speak, with a straight face, show that Akbar knows what is expected of him:

وہ کہتے ہیں یہ ٹھیک ہے ہم کہتے ہیں جی ہاں  بالفعل تو ہم اس کے سوا کچھ نہیں کرتے

They say 'This is correct.': we say 'Quite so.'
And, for the present, this is all we do.[37]

حکم خاموشی ہے اور میری زباں  آپ کی باتیں ہیں میرا کان ہے

The order to be silent binds my tongue.
You have the right to speak, and I to hear.[38]

جھوٹ سے سچ کو کون چھنتا ہے
آپ کہتے ہیں بندہ سنتا ہے

You don't think true and false concern me, do you?
Speak on: your humble servant listens to you.[39]

Even his Indian beloved, to whom he expresses the traditional complete submission demanded of the true lover, is familiar with his situation *vis à vis* the British:[40]

میں نے کہا کہ اپنا سمجھتے مجھے غلام
بولا وہ بُت یہ ہنس کے فرنگی نہیں ہوں میں

I said to her 'Regard me as your slave.'
She laughed and said, '*I'm* not an Englishman!'

[36] II, 91, 5. [37] I, 194, 2. [38] I, 265, 14.
[39] IV, 52, 14. [40] I, 915.

And however respectful and subservient you may be, no Englishman is going to treat you with anything but disdain. Among Indians, a fair complexion is generally admired. But to an Englishman *all* Indians are blacks.[41]

میں کونسے منہ سے انھیں شکل دکھاؤں
گورے کو کہا جب یہ نگوڑا حبشی ہے

How can I have the brazenness to show my face before him?
He's said of fairer men than I, 'The fellow is a black!'

The most that you can expect is a curt greeting.[42]

اب اور چاہیئے نیٹو کے واسطے کیا بات
یہی بہت ہے مشرف ہوئے سلام سے ہم

What greater honour could a native want than that?
Is it not plenty that he said 'Good day' to us?

A native counts for little, and an Indian native for less, and an Indian Muslim native for least of all.[43]

بھلا کیا پوچھنا ہے شانِ اکبر کا زمانے میں کہ وہ نیٹو بھی ہے ہندوستانی بھی مسلماں بھی

Why ask what Akbar's standing is these days?
First, native; second, Indian; third, Muslim.

And in case you ever *should* think of stepping out of line, the police are there to watch you and control you:[44]

ہر گام پہ چند آنکھیں نگراں ہر موڑ پہ اک لیسنس طلب

at every step, eyes watching you, at every turn a demand to show a permit.

Some of Akbar's views of the police are perhaps rather startling to the average law-abiding British citizen, who, on the whole, tends to look upon the police as his protectors. But whatever they may be in Britain, they have perhaps never been that in India. Percival Spear has written of them[45] that they were 'undeniably unpopular. . . . The

[41] I, 279, 8. [42] I, 104, 14.
[43] III, 1437. [44] II, 94, 3–4.
[45] *India, Pakistan and the West*, 4th ed., Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 81.

stigmata of corruption and unnecessary brutality attached themselves to the police from the beginning and have not yet been shaken off.'

And to politically active Indians the "khufia pūlis", the secret police or C.I.D., have always been especially objectionable. Akbar, at any rate, doesn't find much to choose between them and the criminals they are supposed to pursue:[46]

شیخ جی کے دونوں بیٹے باہنر پیدا ہوئے ایک ہیں خفیہ پولیس میں ایک پھانسی پا گئے

The old man only had two sons; both turned out able fellows.
One went into the C.I.D., the other to the gallows.

And in fact one of his objections to the C.I.D. is that it doesn't confine its efforts to checking real crime, but is equally busy checking those liberties on which the British profess to pride themselves.[47]

چوری نہ کبھی کی ہے نہ کرنے کا ارادہ پھر بھی یہ ضرورت ہے کہ بھاگوں جاسوں سے

I never stole, nor do I plan to steal
And yet I have to run away from spies.

And, more bluntly still,[48]

پولیس خفیہ پئے انسدادِ جرم ہے ٹھیک نہ چاہئے کہ وہ ہو انسداد گپ کے لئے

The C.I.D. is busily engaged in checking crime—alright.
It ought not to be busily engaged in checking talk.

And from all this—the contemplation of British power based in the last resort on force of arms which they are prepared to use, but sustained also by other methods, such as an education which moulds their subjects' outlook, trifling concessions which keep them happy, and many other things—Akbar concludes that there is nothing that Indians can do for the forseeable future but accept British rule and make the best of it. In the true tradition of the classical Urdu ghazal, which makes all manner of criticisms of society in words which cannot, when you look at them carefully, be conclusively *proved* to mean what they are correctly assumed to mean, he writes: [49]

بے سود آج تذکرۂ عدل و جور ہے اپنا بھی ایک وقت تھا اُن کا بھی دور ہے

Why talk today of justice and of tyranny?
We had our day; now they are having theirs.

[46] III, 1438. [47] III, 866, 4.
[48] III, 626. [49] IV, 53, 19.

where there is not much doubt that he is associating the idea of justice with Mughal rule, and the idea of tyranny with British rule, although the words do not quite unambiguously say so.
Or in the verse[50]

ہم آہ بھی کرتے ہیں تو ہو جاتے ہیں بدنام  وہ قتل بھی کرتے ہیں تو چرچا نہیں ہوتا

If we so much as sigh we get a bad name.
They kill, and not a word is said about it.

Where the couplet *could* be taken in the context of the prevailing theme of the traditional ghazal, with its cruel mistresses to whose every act of tyranny their true lovers must submit without complaint—but where probably the 'They' of 'They kill' is a reference to the British.

Whatever your view of British rule, it is clear that you cannot stand against it. It is characteristic of Akbar that he combines his unpalatable advice to his fellow-countrymen with ridicule of their Christian rulers' belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, a belief which, to the Muslim, is at best absurd and at worst blasphemous. He writes:[51]

یورپ وَالے جو چاہیں دِل میں بھر دیں  جس کے سر پر جو چاہیں تہمت دھر دیں
بچتے رہو اِن کی تیزیوں سے اکبر  تم کیا ہو خُدا کے تین ٹکڑے کر دیں

The Englishman can slander whom he will
And fill your head with anything he pleases.
He wields sharp weapons, Akbar. Best stand clear!
He cuts up God himself into three pieces.

But, despite the joke, the essential point, as nearly always with Akbar, is a serious one: Akbar is arguing that Muslims must determine how best to live their lives starting from the fact that the British are now all-powerful, and that Indians are going to have to live with this situation for a long, long time.

### *Opportunities and dangers under British rule*

Akbar does not deny that British rule has brought some benefits to India. What he ridicules is the idea that it was established for that purpose, and the accompanying idea that what India has lost by it—if indeed it has lost anything at all—is far outweighed by what it has

[50] I, 299, 6.  [51] I, 1097.

gained. No, he says. The British won India by the sword—or, rather, by the gun—and they hold it by the gun, and hold it in their own interests. But it does not follow that all that they have done is bad; and where they have introduced useful things, it is simple good sense to take advantage of them. This general view leads him to his assessment of Sir Sayyid and the Aligarh movement. And despite much that has been written to the contrary by men who ought to know better (and in some cases undoubtedly *do* know better), that assessment is essentially a positive one. After Sir Sayyid's death in 1898 he wrote of him:[52]

ہماری باتیں ہی باتیں ہیں سیّد کام کرتا تھا — نہ بھولو فرق جو ہے کہنے والے کرنیوالے میں
کہے جو چاہے کوئی میں تو یہ کہتا ہوں اے اکبر — خدا بخشے بہت سی خوبیاں تھیں مرنیوالے میں

We only talk and talk and talk—while Sayyid used to work.
Remember that to talk is not the same thing as to do.
Men may say what they like of him; what Akbar says is this:
God grant him peace now he is dead. His virtues were not few.

And when he writes in this way he is not simply conforming to the conventional principle that one does not speak ill of the dead. His contemptuous epitaph on Sir Sayyid's British mentor, the English Principal of the Aligarh College Mr. Beck, shows a complete disregard for this convention.[53] And there is more conclusive evidence in verses, some of them written during Sir Sayyid's lifetime, in which he praises his efforts and expresses his satisfaction with Aligarh's positive achievement. In 1892 when the College was in great financial difficulties, and the Nizam of Hyderabad came to its aid by doubling his monthly contribution to its funds—increasing this from Rs. 1000 to Rs. 2000—Akbar wrote a poem of 15 couplets expressing his pleasure. The first seven are a generous tribute to Sir Sayyid, and there is not the slightest reason to doubt their sincerity. He writes[54]

سب جانتے ہیں علم سے ہے زندگیِ رُوح — بے علم ہے اگر تو وہ انساں ہے ناتمام
بے علم و بے ہنر ہے جو دُنیا میں کوئی قوم — نیچر کا اقتضا ہے رہے بن کے وہ غلام
تعلیم اگر نہیں ہے زمانے کے حسبِ حال — پھر کیا امیدِ دولت و آرام و احترام
سیّد کے دل میں نقش ہوا اس خیال کا — ڈالی بنائے مدرسہ لے کر خدا کا نام

[52] I, 674. [53] I, 922. [54] I, 622, 1–7.

صدمے اٹھائے رنج سہے گالیاں سنیں  لیکن نہ چھوڑا قوم کے خادم نے اپنا کام
دکھلا دیا زمانہ کو زورِ دل و دماغ  بتلا دیا کہ کرتے ہیں یوں کرنے والے کام
نیت جو تھی بخیر تو برکت خدا نے دی
کالج ہوا درست بصد شان و احتشام

All men know that the life of the spirit depends upon knowledge: without knowledge no man is a complete man: it is an inexorable law of nature that the nation which lacks knowledge and skills is destined to be the slave of others; and if education does not meet the needs of the age then all hopes of attaining wealth and comfort and honour are idle. This thought was engraved upon Sir Sayyid's consciousness, and trusting in God, he laid the foundations of his College. He suffered setbacks, and disappointments, and the abuse of his opponents, but this servant of his nation kept to his task and showed the world what a stout heart and a powerful intellect can do—showed them what hard work really means. And because he worked sincerely God prospered him, and a splendid college was built.

Of all Sir Sayyid's teachings, his reinterpretation of religion was that which commanded least support; indeed the majority of his own most prominent supporters parted company with him in this field. (One of them, Nazīr Aḥmad, remarked caustically that trying to argue as he did was like trying to touch your buttocks with your ears.[55]) True, he shared with many Muslims of the old anti-British trend a puritan urge to revive the pristine simplicity of Islam; but an even more prominent aspect of his reinterpretation was his attempt, exceptionally bold in his day, to show a complete harmony between Islam and the findings of modern science. Akbar, like most of his contemporaries, had little sympathy for this part of Sir Sayyid's teaching. Yet in a poem about Sir Sayyid's religious doctrines,[56] Akbar stresses only the many features in them of which he approves, and says nothing of the others. The sting comes in the tail of the poem but it is most significant that the quite trenchant attack which it makes is directed not at Sir Sayyid, but at other exponents of the New Light whom Akbar contrasts with him.

In short, Akbar is not against progress. He knows that times are changing and that the Muslims must change with them, learning new things and making new adaptations to new conditions. He doesn't object in principle even to changes which he considers unnecessary,

[55] Nazīr Aḥmad, *Mau'iza-i-Ḥasna*, Delhi, 1308 A.H. [A.D. 1890/1] letter 99, p. 175. The book was first published in 1887.

[56] I, 623.

and which he personally dislikes. If you keep strong the faith by which you live, and obey the essential commandments of Islam, you may dress as you like, wear either a Western hat or an Eastern turban just as you please,[57] eat what food you like in whatever company you like,[58] and pay court to Anglo-Indian and British girls. There are verses in which he declares his readiness to accept all these things, provided that the commands of religion are heeded and not ignored.

قائم یہی بوٹ اور موزا رکھئے  دل کو مشتاقِ مس ڈسوزا رکھئے
ان باتوں پہ معترض نہ ہوگا کوئی  پڑھئے جو نماز اور روزہ رکھئے

By all means wear your boots and socks
By all means woo your Christian miss
Just say your prayers and keep the fast
And no one will object to this.[59]

We need to bear these verses in mind when we read others in which he ridicules new fashions. If he thinks them ridiculous he can say so; but that is not the same thing as saying that they transgress the laws of religion, and Akbar *doesn't* say that.

He does, however, express his fears and his misgivings about what Sir Sayyid's teaching and Aligarh education may ultimately lead to. In one of the relatively few verses directly critical of Sir Sayyid himself he questions how far his vision really went.[60]

کیا جانئے سید تھے حق آگاہ کہاں تک
سمجھے نہ کہ سیدھی ہے مری راہ کہاں تک

And for all his general approval of Aligarh education, he feels that there is an emphasis upon material and secular things which obscures to a dangerous extent the even greater importance of a strong faith in religion as the only sure guide on life's journey.

A whole poem on the Aligarh College leads up to this point.[61]

[57] I, 152.
[58] I, 638.
[59] II, 86, 6–7. Many more verses could be quoted. II, 75, 8–19—a poem of eleven couplets—gives a long list of all the things that can be allowed provided that religious obligations are observed. Cf. also II, 23, 13; 80, 13–14 and 21; and 83, 15.
[60] I, 99, 1.
[61] I, 640.

خدا علی گڑھ کے مدرسے کو تمام امراض سے شفا دے — بھرے ہوئے ہیں رئیس زادے امیر زادے شریف زادے
لطیف و خوش وضع چست و چالاک و صاف و پاکیزہ شاد و خرم — طبیعتوں میں ہے ان کی جودت دلوں میں انکے ہیں نیک ارادے
کمال محنت سے پڑھ رہے ہیں کمالِ غیرت سے بڑھ رہے ہیں — سوار مشرق کی راہ میں ہیں تو مغربی راہ میں پیادے
ہر اک ہے ان میں کا بیشک ایسا کہ آپ اسے چاہتے ہیں جیسا — دکھائے محفل میں قدرِ عنا، جو آپ آئیں تو سر جھکا دے
فقیر مانگیں تو صاف کہدیں کہ تو ہے مضبوط جا کما کھا — قبول فرمائیں آپ دعوت تو اپنا سرمایہ کل کھلا دے
بتوں سے ان کو نہیں لگاوٹ رسموں کی لیتے نہیں وہ آہٹ — تمام قوت ہے صرف خواندن نظر کے بھولے ہیں دل کے سادے
نظر بھی آئے جو زلفِ پیچاں تو سمجھیں یہ کوئی پالیسی ہے — الکٹرک لائٹ اس کو سمجھیں جو برق وش کوئی مسکرا دے
نکلتے ہیں کر کے غول بندی بنام تہذیب و دردمندی — یہ کہہ کے لیتے ہیں سب سے چندے ہمیں جو تم دو تمھیں خدا دے
انھیں اسی بات پر یقیں ہے کہ بس یہی اصل کارِ دیں ہے — اسی سے ہوگا فروغِ قومی اسی سے چمکیں گے باپ دادے
مکانِ کالج کے سب مکیں ہیں ابھی انھیں تجربے نہیں ہیں — خبر نہیں ہے کہ آگے چل کر ہے کیسی منزل ہیں کیسے جادے
دلوں میں ان کے ہے نور ایماں قوی نہیں ہے مگر نگہباں — ہوائے منطق ادائے طفلی یہ شمع ایسا نہ ہو بجھا دے
فریب دے کر نکالے مطلب سکھائے تحقیرِ دین و مذہب — مٹا دے آخر کو وضعِ ملت نمودِ ذاتی کو گر بڑھا دے

یہی بس اکبر کی التجا ہے جنابِ باری میں یہ دعا ہے
علوم و حکمت کا درس ان کو پروفیسر دیں سمجھ خدا دے

Which, in slightly abridged translation, is:

May God confer on Aligarh a cure for every malady
And on its students, scions of the gentry and nobility.
Refined, and elegant, and smart, and clean, and neat, and radiant,
Hearts full of good intentions, minds blessed with originality,
They ride the highways of the East, and plod along the western ways,
Each one of them, without a doubt, everything you would have him be.

No Indian fair, no English miss, diverts them from their chosen path;
Their hearts are innocent and pure; their books absorb their energy.

The lightning of a fair one's smile they take for electricity
And if they see a curling tress they think it is some policy.

* * *

All of them dwell in College, still without experience of life;
They do not know what lies ahead, nor what should be their destiny.
The flame of faith burns in their hearts, but those who guard it are not firm
And logic's winds may blow it out, or youthful immaturity,
Ensnaring them, and teaching them to hold religion in contempt
And, seeking fame, to bring to nought the ways of their community.

I pray then: May the boons of knowledge and of understanding be
Bestowed on them by their professors and their God—respectively.

Akbar does not want a situation in which the polish of Western learning and Western manners cramps and restricts the free play of religious feeling. In an apt metaphor he writes of one to whom this has happened:[62]

سبحہ صندل کا ہے مگر افسوس  دب گئی بُو "فرنچ" پالش سے

His rosary is sandalwood. Alas!
Its fragrance is imprisoned in French polish.

He distrusts the emphasis which the spokesmen of the New Light put upon reason and science, and their claim that religious truths can be proved a hundred per cent by rational, scientific means. Akbar (and, incidentally, in Sir Sayyid's own camp, Naẕīr Aḥmad) insisted that religious belief involves the recognition that reason and science can take you only so far, and that the essence of religion is beyond their reach:[63]

خدا باہر ہے حدِّ دُوربیں سے

God is beyond the range of telescopes

as he puts it. In the last resort, religion is a matter of faith, and long discussions about it are pointless. He writes:[64]

خدا کے باب میں یہ غور کیا ہے
خدا کیا ہے؟ خدا ہے، اور کیا ہے

Why all this concentration on the problem?
You ask what God is? God is God. What else?

[62] III, 772. [63] II, 46, 3. [64] III, 728, 1.

And, more sarcastically:[65]

مذہبی بحث میں نے کی ہی نہیں
فالتو عقل مجھ میں تھی ہی نہیں

I take no part when they discuss religion;
I haven't the intelligence to spare.

In fact, discussion of these questions is not only pointless, but positively harmful. Akbar correctly foresaw that exaggerated claims for reason and science would lead to a situation where, far from strengthening religious faith, they would undermine and ultimately destroy it, and he warned his fellow-Muslims against this danger:[66]

سیّد صاحب سکھا گئے ہیں جو شعور  کہتا نہیں تم سے میں کہ ہو اس سے نفور
سوتوں کو جگا دیا انھوں نے لیکن  اللہ کا نام لے کے اٹھنا ہے ضرور

Practice the ways Sir Sayyid's movement taught you
Nothing in them need give you cause for shame.
He woke you from your sleep; but now remember
When you arise, arise in Allah's name.

—a point which, addressing students directly, he makes in terms which he thinks will perhaps enable them to grasp it more easily. Their college course, he tells them, leads up to the Convocation at the end of their student life where, if they have worked as they should, they will get their degree. It's the same, he tells them, with this life and the Day of Judgment:[67]

زندگی اور قیامت میں ریلیشن سمجھو  اس کو کالج اور اسے کانووکیشن سمجھو

Life and the Last Day bear the same relation—
(Mark this)—as College does to Convocation.

He feels that the leaders of the New Light, including even Sir Sayyid himself, lack something fundamental, that instead of stressing the key importance of a strong and all-pervading religious faith which guides a man in every aspect of his life, they ask you to put your trust in methods

[65] III, 447, 1. [66] I, 463. [67] I, 923, 1.

which are all too trivial to achieve the substantial results the Muslim community needs:[68]

مسلمانوں کی خوش حالی کی بے شک دھن ہے سیّد کو
مگر یہ کام نکلے گا نہ لیکچر سے نہ چندوں سے
دُرستی تختِ عزّت کی کہاں اِن کیل کانٹوں میں
توقع شہ سواری کی نہ رکھو نعل بندوں سے

Sir Sayyid sought—no doubt of it—well-being for us Muslims.
But lectures and subscriptions? How can these set us on course?
Mere nails and tacks will not avail to mend the throne of honour.
Do not expect great horsemanship from him who shoes the horse.

And most of all he dislikes those in the Aligarh movement for whom the final unexceptionable formulation of what is good for the Muslims is what their British rulers say is good for them, who think that the will of God and the will of the British government are identical, and for whom, therefore, for all practical purposes the British *are* God. Get rid of the satirical exaggeration in all this, and it expresses accurately enough what was essentially Sir Sayyid's own stand. Akbar (and almost everyone else since his day resembles him in this respect) could not find it in him to say this bluntly, but we can be certain that it is Sir Sayyid's too pronounced partiality for the British that Akbar mocks in a fairly light-hearted way when he writes (in Persian, which he occasionally uses for his verse):[69]

عقلِ سیّد بود از انوارِ حکمت بافته — زورِ بازویش عدو را پنجہا بر تافته
مشکلے در پیش ہست اورا اگر گویم نبی — ز انبیاء ہرگز کسے نہ گزشت پنشن یافته

Sir Sayyid had an intellect that radiated learning
And strength enough to vanquish any foe you care to mention
And I for one would readily have counted him a prophet
But that there never was a prophet yet who drew a pension.

However, the out-and-out attack on people who seem to regard the British as God is launched not against Sir Sayyid, but against other (unnamed) leaders of the modern school. In the poem referred to

[68] I, 260, 5–6. [69] I, 928.

earlier, in which Akbar expresses his agreement with many of Sir Sayyid's religious beliefs, he turns in the end upon leaders of this kind:[70]

جواب حضرتِ سیّد کا خوب ہے اکبر — ہم ان کے قولِ دُرست و بجا کو مانتے ہیں
ولیکن اس نئی تہذیب کے بزرگ اکثر — خدا کو اور نہ طریقِ دعا کو مانتے ہیں
زبانی کہتے ہیں سب کچھ مگر حقیقت میں — وہ صرف قوّتِ فرماں روا کو مانتے ہیں

What our respected Sayyid says is good.
Akbar agrees that it is sound and fair.
But most of those who head this modern school
Neither believe in God, nor yet in prayer.
They *say* they do, but it is plain to see
What *they* believe in is the powers that be.

Other verses make the same point:[71]

مگر ہاں شیخ جی کی پالیسی سے ہم نہیں واقف
اسی پر ختم کرتے ہیں کہ جو صاحب کی مرضی ہو

. . . But not for me the shaikh jī's policy
Whose final word is 'What the Sahib commands'.

As we saw earlier, Akbar knows that 'what the Sahib commands', he commands in the Sahib's interest, and it by no means follows that the Sahib's interest is the Muslim's interest too. He writes:[72]

روز افزوں ہے بلاشبہ برٹش اقبال
جو خلاف اس کے تصوّر کرے وہ وہمی ہے
اپنا اقبال مگر اس نے جو سمجھا ہے اسے
یہ نئی روشنی کی سخت غلط فہمی ہے

With every passing day the fortunes of the British prosper. No doubt about it. And he who thinks otherwise is dreaming. But he who thinks that this is the same as *our* fortunes prospering is, like the New Light, very much mistaken.

[70] I, 623, 14–16.
[71] II, 59, 9–10. And compare note 73 below.
[72] II, 82, 3–4.

Akbar, then, shows a reluctance to attack Sir Sayyid personally; but the rarity in his verse of direct criticism of Sir Sayyid himself is due largely to another cause. It is important to remember that Akbar was, as near as makes no difference, a whole generation (twenty-nine years to be quite precise) younger than Sir Sayyid. Sir Sayyid achieved his great aim in life when the Aligarh College opened in 1877; and Akbar was already thirty-one years old in that year. But he went on writing verse for more than forty years after that, i.e. until twenty-three years after Sir Sayyid's death. And the main target of his attack is not so much Sir Sayyid's contemporaries as the subsequent generations of Aligarh graduates, in whom he sees very few of the virtues of Sir Sayyid's generation, and in their place all the weaknesses and deficiencies of the Aligarh pioneers accentuated and brought to fruition. He says of them:[73]

گذشتند آں قدر یاراں زحدِ سیّد اے اکبر  کہ آں مرحوم اکنوں در شمار شیخ می آید

So far have they transcended Sayyid's limits
That now they number him among the shaikhs

—the shaikh, or Muslim elder, being the symbol not only in Akbar's verse but in the whole long tradition of Islamic lyrical poetry, of the ignorant, bigoted, conservative pillar of orthodox religion. And in a long poem[74] (forty-six couplets long) he enumerates the sins of this later generation and explicitly says that[75]:

ہوا سب کو تعجب کیوں ہوئیں یہ حالتیں پیدا
نہ تھا یہ مطلب سید کہ اس رُخ پر چلے دھارا

All are surprised to see these new developments.
It was not Sayyid's aim that things should take this course.

*Akbar's polemic against the ultra-modern*

It is against these unworthy sons of the Aligarh movement that perhaps the largest part, and certainly the most popular part, of his most significant verse is directed. Verses in which the tone is one of sorrow

[73] I, 67. 'Shaikh' here carries the connotation which I explain in the text. I should add that it does not always mean quite that. It can be used of any Muslim leader, in the political as well as in the religious field, who claims more importance and authority than the poet thinks he deserves. This is the sense in the line quoted earlier (see ref. 71). Below (at ref. 81) it has no pejorative sense at all, but means simply the Muslim elder who imparts religious instruction to the young.

[74] I, 594. [75] Line 23.

rather than anger describe what he thinks is the essence of their condition. He makes them say of themselves:[76]

جو بات مناسب ہے وہ حاصل نہیں کرتے جو اپنی گرہ میں ہے اسے کھو بھی رہے ہیں
بے علم بھی ہم لوگ ہیں غفلت بھی ہے طاری افسوس کہ اندھے بھی ہیں اور سو بھی رہے ہیں

We do not learn the things we ought to learn—
And lose what was already in our keeping;
Bereft of knowledge, plunged in heedlessness,
Alas! We are not only blind but sleeping.

And there is much truth in his words. Sir Sayyid and his contemporaries came fresh to the new learning of the West, but at any rate they came equipped with all the traditional learning of their community behind them. Not so the next generation. It was modern enough to regard the old learning as not worth its attention, and yet not so truly modern as to put itself seriously to the task of really mastering a new fund of knowledge and a new culture. It is again in sadness more than in anger that Akbar speaks of them[77] as youngsters who have set out on the long road to the West but have been robbed on the way—at a point too far from home for them to be able to return and too far from their destination for them to have any hope of reaching it. But he is not always so sympathetic, especially when he contemplates those who don't even want any more for themselves than the government wants them to have. He sees that the sort of half-baked education which government colleges or government-approved colleges supply suits British needs very well:

They give us learning—just enough for us to sell our services
And understanding—just enough for governmental purposes.

What he *can't* see is how his fellow-Muslims, the descendants of a people inspired by a dynamic faith which had enabled them to change the course of history and transform the lives of hundreds of millions of mankind, can be content, and indeed proud, to have no horizons beyond a life of unthinking, undistinguished subservience to a nation that has deprived them of all the power and the honour they had once enjoyed, and whose representatives for the most part look upon them with contempt.[78]

[76] I, 755.
[77] II, 66, 6:

راہِ مغرب میں یہ لڑکے لُٹ گئے واں نہ پہونچے اور ہم سے چھُٹ گئے

[78] II, 78, 18.

مٹاتے ہیں جو وہ ہم کو تو اپنا کام کرتے ہیں
مجھے حیرت تو اُن پر ہے جو اس مٹنے پہ مرتے ہیں

If they—the British—destroy us, they do it to serve their own purposes. What astonishes me is that there are those among us who rejoice in our destruction

—like birds, who under the spell of the irresistible fowler, help tighten the snares with their own beaks[79]

اپنی منقاروں سے حلقہ کس رہے ہیں جال کا  طائروں پہ سحر ہے صیاد کے اقبال کا

He doesn't lose his sense of humour, but his contempt for these people's petty ideals is quite unmistakable. He writes:[80]

ہم کیا کہیں احباب کیا کارنمایاں کر گئے  بی اے ہوئے نوکر ہوئے پنشن ملی پھر مر گئے

What words of mine can tell the deeds of men like these, our nation's pride? They got their B.A., took employment, drew their pensions and then died.

Or in a more savage mood:[81]

چھوڑ لٹریچر کو اپنی ہسٹری کو بھول جا
شیخ و مسجد سے تعلق ترک کر اسکول جا
چار دن کی زندگی ہے کوفت سے کیا فائدہ
کھا ڈبل روٹی کلرکی کر خوشی سے پھول جا

Give up your literature, say I; forget your history
Break all your ties with shaikh and mosque—it could not matter less.
Go off to school. Life's short. Best not to worry overmuch.
Eat English bread, and push your pen, and swell with happiness.

For those who haven't quite forgotten their literature he recalls the story of the legendary Persian lover Farhād and his beloved Shīrīn. Farhād was promised Shīrīn if he would dig through a mountain. Like you, says Akbar, it was in pursuit of his own interests that he spent all

[79] II, 71, 9.
[80] II, 64, 19.
[81] II, 51, 5–6. And compare note 73 above.

his strength. But, *un*like you, he at any rate did it for something worth while:[82]

اعلیٰ مقصود چاہیئے پیشِ نظر — کوشش تری گو ہو لطفِ ذاتی کے لئے
فرہاد پہاڑ پر عمل کرتا تھا — شیریں کے لئے کہ ناشپاتی کے لئے

You need a lofty aim to set before you
Even if your own gain is all your care.
Remember, when Farhād dug through the mountain
He did it for Shīrīn, not for a pear.

Whereas you give up[83] your religion, abandon your people, change your appearance, and waste your days—all in the hope of getting a miserable clerk's job. What an impressive range of betrayal, and for what a contemptibly petty gain. And even so, not everyone gets what all these betrayals are calculated to achieve. The Sahibs don't always reward their would-be humble servants in proportion to their expectations, and they are often genuinely at a loss to understand why. One such bewildered gentleman asks the British why their policy has to be so obscure when *his* policy is so clear.[84]

تمہاری پالیسی کا حال کچھ کھلتا نہیں صاحب — ہماری پالیسی تو صاف ہے ایماں فروشی کی

Your policy is quite obscure to us, Sahib.
*Our* policy is clear—to sell our faith.

Another, led to expect that learning English is a sure passport to advancement and to positions of responsibility, finds to his disappointment that this is not so. Akbar spells it out for him:[85]

نوکر کو سکھاتے ہیں میاں اپنی زباں — مطلب یہ ہے کہ سمجھے ان کے فرماں
مقصود نہیں میاں کی سی عقل و تمیز — اس نکتہ کو کیا وہ سمجھیں جو ہیں ناداں

[82] I, 579.
[83] I, 151, 3:

مذہب چھوڑو ملّت چھوڑو، صورت بدلو، عمر گنواؤ
صرف کلرکی کی اُمید اور اتنی مُصیبت توبہ توبہ

[84] I, 179, 2. [85] I, 907.

They teach you English, he says, for the same reason that an English master teaches his foreign servant English—so that the man can understand and carry out the orders he receives. Only a fool thinks he does it to raise the servant's intelligence and understanding to the same level as his own. Another wonders why Sir Sayyid (whose English was in fact not all that good) did so well, while he (whose English is much better) isn't doing too well. Akbar explains the point:[86]

تم انگریزی داں ہو وہ انگریز داں ہے

True, you know English, but *he* knew the English.

In other words, it's not enough to learn the things the English want you to learn. Having done so you have to convince them also that they need your services. It seems that already in Akbar's day it was becoming increasingly difficult to do this, and that the problem of graduate unemployment was already emerging. He writes:[87]

کالج میں دھوم مچ رہی ہے پاس پاس کی
عہدوں سے آ رہی ہے صدا دور دور کی

The verse depends for its effect upon an untranslatable play on words. He says that the cry of the graduates is 'Pās! Pās!' while the cry of the British is 'Dūr! Dūr!' 'Pās' has two meanings. In the indigenous Urdu sense it means 'near', but its English meaning, of a 'pass' in an examination was already well established in Urdu by Akbar's time. 'Dūr' means 'far', and also, as an exclamation, 'Go away!' So, says Akbar, the graduates cry 'Near!' while the British cry 'Far!'—or, the graduates cry 'We've passed our examinations' and the British reply 'What of it? Go away!'

Because Akbar is a man of genuine human sympathies, a really bitter, savage tone is relatively rare in his verse. Often the tone is one of quite light-hearted mockery, as when, for example, he ridicules the dependence of the modern student upon written notes. Under the old system of education with its emphasis on memory and on learning by heart, when you knew a thing you knew it for evermore. But the habit of note-taking has destroyed all that. According to Muslim belief, when a Muslim is buried two angels come into the grave and question him

[86] I, 656, last line. [87] I, 1008, last line.

about his faith and the kind of life he has lived. Akbar portrays a modern student in this situation:[88]

جب نکیرین آئے میری قبر میں بہر سوال — میں نے یہ چاہا کہ لکھوا دوں انھیں سب اپنا حال
ہاتھ پاکٹ میں جو ڈالا مجھ کو حیرت ہو گئی — یعنی تھی جو نوٹ بک وہ اِس سفر میں کھو گئی
کہدیا میں نے کہ میں اب ہر طرح معذور ہوں — رہ گئی دُنیا میں میری نوٹ بک مجبور ہوں

When the angels both appeared inside the grave to question me
I myself intended to explain things comprehensively.
Delving in my pocket for my notebook, I was shocked to find
I had lost it on the way there—or, perhaps, left it behind.
Much confused I said, 'I really *must* apologise to you,
I have left my notebook in the world—there's *nothing* I can do.'

In a similar tone he defends the modern student's reluctance to believe in the throne of God:[89]

کیوں کر خدا کے عرش کے قائل ہوں یہ عزیز
جغرافئے میں عرش کا نقشہ نہیں ملا

Poor fellows, how can they believe that there's a throne of God?
It wasn't on the maps they studied in geography.

Or he excuses their religious shortcomings by explaining how they have been led to think that access to such examples of modern technique as the British send their way enables them to solve all problems—not only here, he says, but in the next world too, where they will have such difficulties to face as the crossing of the bridge of Sirāt—thin as a hair, and sharp as a sword—that leads to Paradise. That's no problem in their eyes, he says:[90]

یاروں کو فکرِ روزِ جزا کچھ نہیں رہی — بس کام ہے انھیں رہِ عیش و نشاط سے
کہتے ہیں حرج کیا ہے جو باریک ہو وہ پُل — بائیسکل پہ گزریں گے ہم پُل صراط سے

No more they fear the day of retribution;
They concentrate on doing what they like.
What if the bridge to Paradise is narrow?
They say they'll ride across it on a bike.

Against the most daring of them, who have gone to the lengths of openly

[88] III, 1217. [89] III, 1314. [90] I, 1192

abandoning religion, he speaks more trenchantly, but still humorously, sometimes appealing to their own strongest prejudices and beliefs in facetious proof of his own propositions. Thus he tells an imaginary story:[91]

ہوا آج خارج جو میرا سوال　　کہا میں نے صاحب سے با صد ملال
کہاں جاؤں میں اب ذرا یہ بتاؤ　　وہ جھنجھلا کے بولا جہنم میں جاؤ
یہ سُنکر بہت طبع غمگیں ہوئی　　مگر اس تصور سے تسکیں ہوئی
کہ جب اہل یورپ میں بھی ذکر ہے
تو بے شک جہنم بھی ہے کوئی شے

Today when my petition was rejected
I asked the Sahib, feeling much dejected,
'Where shall I go to now Sir? Kindly tell.'
He growled at me and answered 'Go to Hell!'
I left him, and my heart was really sinking;
But soon I started feeling better, thinking,
'A European said so! In that case
At any rate there must *be* such a place!'

He makes a good deal of play with the theories of Darwin, still, let us remember, newcomers to the scientific scene in the days when Akbar wrote, and still disputed in Britain, let alone in India. Sometimes he uses them to point the contrast between the world of Islam, with its strong tradition of spiritual values, and that of the increasingly narrow materialism of the modern West. The Muslim mystics sought to draw ever closer to God until the individual soul merged with God and no longer had any separate existence. Manṣūr al-Hallāj, *the* mystic hero of Persian and Urdu classical poetry, attained to this ideal, and expressed it in the ecstatic cry of 'I am God!' Very different, says Akbar, are the thoughts that inspire the Western scientist to ecstasy.[92]

کہا منصور نے خدا ہوں میں　　ڈارون بولے بوزنا ہوں میں

Mansūr in ecstasy cried 'I am God!'
Darwin's ecstatic cry is 'I'm an ape!'

There is a hint of the same argument in another verse in which he ridicules the blind, quite mindless imitation of everything British which

[91] II, 69, 7–10.　　[92] III, 1212, 2.

characterizes the ultra-modern. In it he makes one of them—who is of course a believer in Darwin's theory—tell his British superior:[93]

ہم تو انساں سے بنے جاتے ہیں بندر اے حضور  آپ خوش قسمت تھے بندر سے جو انساں ہو گئے

Fate favoured you, kind sir: *you* grew from monkeyhood to manhood.
See *our* ill-luck: once men, we grow more monkey-like each day.

A sort of evolution in reverse.

A community of people that has forsaken all values of its own and lives in unthinking imitation of the ways of others, isn't really alive. And if the East is subject to the power of the West, then in a way that is fitting, for it simply exemplifies the law that the disposal of the dead is in the hands of the living.[94]

مشرق بہ دستِ مغرب مردہ بہ دستِ زندہ

He takes an ultra-modern argument and uses it as a means of hitting them hard with this concept:[95]

بعدِ مُردن کچھ نہیں یہ فلسفہ مردُود ہے  قوم ہی کو دیکھئے مُردہ ہے اور موجود ہے

You say 'There's nothing after death?' What nonsense!
Just look at us. *We're* dead, and *we're* still here.

Some verses poke fun at those among the moderns who go a little too fast even for their fellow moderns. A short poem relates how a young man, recently graduated, approaches a young woman, also recently graduated, confident that their modernity and their higher education dispenses with the need to observe old-fashioned conventions. He says to her:[96]

میں بھی گریجویٹ ہوں تو بھی گریجویٹ
علمی مباحثے ہوں ذرا پاس آ کے لیٹ

Both you and I have passed our graduation
Lie down, let's have a learned conversation.

But, to his disappointment she doesn't see things quite that way. But never mind. At any rate within the marriage relationship refinement,

[93] II, 35, 15.  [94] III, 539.
[95] II, 90, 10.  [96] III, 1210, 1.

both of husbands and wives, is gaining ground rapidly. Akbar knows of a couple who have become as refined as anyone could wish:[97]

خدا کے فضل سے بی بی میاں دونوں مہذّب ہیں
حجاب اُن کو نہیں آتا انھیں غصہ نہیں آتا

Praise be! Both wife and husband are refined.
She feels no shame: he feels no indignation.

The quite fatuous importance which these gentlemen attach to things just because they're European, British or British-approved, is a target of constant mockery:[98]

چیز وہ ہے بنے جو یورپ میں  بات وہ ہے جو پائنیر میں چھپے

The things that signify are those that come to us from Europe
The words that signify, those printed in the *Pioneer*.

—The *Pioneer* being a famous English-language paper published from Akbar's city of Allahabad, and taking a line which can fairly be described as more viceregal than the Viceroy. Akbar's own opinion of the *Pioneer* was not a very high one. He once remarked that Allahabad produced only two really good things—and the *Pioneer* was not one of them. The two were Akbar—i.e. himself—and *amrūd*—guavas:[99]

کچھ الہ آباد میں ساماں نہیں بہبود کے  یاں دھرا کیا ہے بجز اکبرؔ کے اور امرود کے

and while one might now wish to extend the list, these two items should indeed appear on it. Akbar regarded the *Pioneer* as a British propaganda sheet, concerned, like all propaganda sheets, to print not what the propagandist believes, but what he wants his readers to believe. Akbar writes of it sarcastically:[100]

گھر کے خط میں ہے کہ کل ہو گیا چہلم اس کا
پائنیر لکھتا ہے بیمار کا حال اچھا ہے

Letters from home have told us that his funeral rites are over:
The *Pioneer* reports his state as 'satisfactory'.

[97] III, 28, 2.  [98] II, 62, 7.
[99] II, 66, 5.  [100] I, 243, 3.

The ultra-modern, however, model their whole life style on abhorrence of what is Indian and worship of what is Western, and Akbar doesn't spare them from his sarcasm. Even the old conventional Muslim shaikh, he says, is affected by this worship of the West, so much so that he modifies the Islamic prohibition on wine:[101]

مرعوب ہو گئے ہیں ولایت سے شیخ جی  اب صرف منع کرتے ہیں دیسی شراب کو

Even the shaikh has fallen to their spell:
All he prohibits now is *Indian* wine.

How much *more* impressionable then, are the true products of the New Light:[102]

باپ ماں سے شیخ سے اللہ سے کیا ان کو کام
ڈاکٹر جنوا گئے تعلیم دی سرکار نے

What do they want with parents, or with maulvis, or with God?
They owe their birth to doctors and their schooling to the state.

ہوئے اس قدر مہذب کبھی گھر کا منہ نہ دیکھا
کٹی عمر ہوٹلوں میں مرے اسپتال جا کر

So great is their refinement now, they've bid their parents' home goodbye
They spend their lives in restaurants and go to hospital to die.[103]

And, even more coldly:[104]

وضع بدلی، گھر کو چھوڑا، کاغذوں میں چھپ گئے  چند روزہ کھیل تھا آخر کو سب مر کھپ گئے

They changed their fashions, left their homes, and got into the papers.
But after all it doesn't last. Death ended all their capers.

'Got into the papers'—It always annoys Akbar no end that these people will sacrifice the last ounce of self-respect for a little publicity. The absurd pride which they feel at seeing their name in the press, receiving titles from the British government, or being nominated to a place in the British-controlled councils is ridiculed in hundreds of

[101] III, 1120, 2.
[102] III, 733, 5.
[103] I, 875, 1.
[104] II, 98, 5.

verses. Sometimes the point is made in metaphor, as when the owl is taken (as it always is in colloquial Urdu) as the symbol of a stupid man:[105]

دید کے قابل اب اس اُلّو کا فخر و ناز ہے  جس سے مغرب نے کہا تو آنریری باز ہے

Look at the owl! What airs and graces! What a way to talk!
Because the British told him he's an honorary hawk!

The crow too may aspire to similar distinction:[106]

پارک میں ان کے دیا کرتا ہے اسپیچ وفا
زاغ ہو جائے گا اک دن آنریری عندلیب

Perched in their park the crow makes loyal speeches
One day they'll make him honorary nightingale.

Sometimes the emphasis is slightly different—that of a man who goes into the councils not so much for the fame as for the material advantages he hopes for:[107]

حقیقت میں، میں ہوں بُلبُل مگر چارے کی خواہش میں
بنا ہوں ممبر کونسل یہاں مٹھّو میاں ہو کر

I'm actually a nightingale, but since I want to eat
I pretend to be a parrot and accept a council seat

—where the metaphor of the parrot again stresses that in Akbar's view the members of the council do nothing more than mouth the words their British masters expect them to repeat. If you want to go in for such antics, he says, perform them at home, where at any rate the public can't see you. And refresh yourself with water from Banaras and guavas from Allahabad. You'll at any rate be performing in an Indian context and consuming Indian products—and all that will contribute more to Indian welfare than capering about in the councils.[108]

کیوں اپنے سر پہ زحمتِ بے سود لیجئے  کونسل کے بدلے گھر میں اچھل کود لیجئے
کھاپی کے گھر میں بیٹھئے اور گائیے بھجن  کاشی سے جل، پراگ سے امرود لیجئے
ہو وضع اپنے دیس کی، مال اپنے دیس کا  بہتر ہے راہِ منزلِ بہبود لیجئے

[105] IV, 53, 9.  [106] II, 10, 3.
[107] I, 1062, 4.  [108] III, 1129.

In general, Akbar has a pretty cordial dislike for all public performers on the political stage, whether they act in parts assigned to them by the British or in the self-assigned role of national leaders fearlessly representing their nation's or their community's interests. There are so many of them, says Akbar, that they are like an army of generals, proud of their high rank, but apparently without any followers:[109]

لیڈروں کی دُھوم ہے اور فالور کوئی نہیں  سب تو جنرل ہیں یہاں آخر سپاہی کون ہے

And that is not surprising, for only the gullible take seriously their ostensible concern for ordinary people:[110]

بہت روئے وہ اسپیچوں میں حکمت اس کو کہتے ہیں
میں سمجھا خیر خواہ ان کو حماقت اسکو کہتے ہیں

He made his speech with copious tears—and that is known as 'policy'
I thought he was my well-wisher—and that is called 'stupidity'.

They sit in their great houses, burning with anguished love for their people:[111]

محل میں بیٹھ کر اب عشقِ قومی میں تڑپتے ہیں

More remarkable still:[112]

قوم کے غم میں ڈنر کھاتے ہیں حکّام کے ساتھ  رنج لیڈر کو بہت ہے مگر آرام کے ساتھ

In mourning for their nation's plight they dine with the authorities.
Our leaders suffer deeply for us, but they suffer at their ease.

Not that they forget their supporters:[113]

شکر ادا کرنا ہے واجب ان کی طبع نیک کا
ہر ڈنر سے بھیجتے ہیں مجھ کو فوٹو کیک کا

I must not be ungrateful: see the trouble that he takes—
After each meal he eats he sends a photo of the cakes.

[109] III, 996, 3. [110] II, 55, last line. [111] III, 1335.
[112] III, 1349. [113] II, 70, 15.

And some even make the supreme sacrifice:[114]

اک ڈنر میں کھا گیا اتنا کہ نکلی تن سے جان  خدمتِ قومی میں بارے جاں نثاری ہو گئی

He ate so much, his spirit left his body.
Such sacrifice! He gave his life for us!

If you can't be a political leader, be a journalist and edit a newspaper. Leader is to editor as thief is to pickpocket:[115]

چور کے بھائی گرہ کٹ تو سُنا کرتے تھے  اب یہ سنتے ہیں ایڈیٹر کے برادر لیڈر

Numbers of both have grown rapidly:[116]

تمام قوم ایڈیٹر بنی ہے یا لیڈر  سبب یہ ہے کہ کوئی اور دل لگی نہ رہی

The country swarms with editors and leaders
Who can't find any other games to play.

And the one is about as effective as the other. He laughs at the idea that you can effectively oppose a power that rules in the last resort by force of arms with what in your gullibility you are pleased to call the power of the press, and mocks at those who:[117]

جب توپ مقابل ہے تو اخبار نکالو

Faced with a gun, bring out a newspaper.

or who demonstrate the bankruptcy of their much-vaunted 'national advancement' by arguing that if they can't deploy a regiment they can at any rate bring out a *risāla*.[118]

ملکی ترقیوں میں دِوالے نکالئے  پلٹن نہیں تو خیر رسالے نکالئے

This is again a play upon words: *risāla* means a detachment of cavalry; but it also means 'a periodical'. But anyway, in their own eyes all is going well:[119]

مزا ہے اسپیچ میں ڈنر میں خبر بھی چھپتی ہے پانیر میں
فلک کی گردش کے ساتھ ہی ساتھ کام یارو کا چل رہا ہے

[114] III, 963, 2.
[115] IV, 18, 1.
[116] II, 89, 19.
[117] III, 1430.
[118] I, 765.
[119] II, 37, 20.

They speak, they dine, their names get printed in the *Pioneer*.
Day follows day: our friends draw nearer to their heart's desire.

He often stresses the distance they keep from ordinary people. In the later days of more militant agitations than were common in the nineteenth century, when it was quite common—and quite fashionable, says Akbar—for leaders to go to jail, he writes of them:[120]

ہم کلرکوں سے کہاں راحت ہے ان کو میل میں
وہ تو ہیں اب وفد میں یا وعظ میں یا جیل میں

Mixing with us clerks? Oh, no! The greater pleasures must prevail
They must go on deputations, or to meetings, or to jail

And since it is these people who now lead the nation, the prospects as the end of the nineteenth century approaches are, Akbar reflects, none too bright:[121]

مذہب کی کہوں تو دِل لگی میں اڑ جائے　　مطلب کی کہوں تو پالیسی میں اڑ جائے
باقی سرِ قوم میں ابھی ہے کچھ ہوش　　غالب ہے کہ یہ بھی اس صدی میں اُڑ جائے

Religious truths? They make a joke of them.
Sound sense? Oh no! That is not policy.
The nation still has *some* sense in its head.
That too may not outlast this century.

In fact the new century was to bring a new mood to the Muslims, leading them to ways of thinking more in line with his own. But let us take stock of Akbar's positive beliefs. We have seen what he was against: let us look more directly for a while at what he was for.

### *What Akbar is for*

One doesn't expect of a satirist that he should pay as much attention to what men ought to do as to what they are doing and ought *not* to be doing, and some critics, who perhaps bear too close a resemblance to the targets of Akbar's wrath to feel comfortable with him, have belittled him for his so-called 'negative' approach. 'If Sir Sayyid had never existed', wrote one of them, 'Akbar would never have been a poet.'[122] But negative criticism always implies positive comment.

[120] IV, 32, 9.　　[121] I, 578.

[122] The exact words (translated from Urdu) are 'If Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and *Avadh Punch* had not existed, Sayyid Akbar Ḥusain Ṣāḥib too would not have been a

It surely doesn't take much wit to see that, for example, an attack on hypocrisy implies a plea for sincerity. And secondly, while Akbar, like every satirist, concentrates on attacking the vices and abuses that he sees in the society around him, he does in fact directly advocate positive attitudes and positive courses of action as well.

Professor Aziz Ahmad, of the University of Toronto, says of him[123] that he is 'fiercely anti-Western, antipathetic to all modernisation'. But that is simply not true. It is true that some of Akbar's phrasing could at first sight give that impression; and equally true that like men in all countries and all ages who are dissatisfied with the present, he sometimes paints too rosy a picture of the past—mistaking for a memory what is in fact an aspiration.[124] Take for instance the line:[125]

نہ کتابوں سے نہ کالج کے ہے در سے پیدا
دین ہوتا ہے بزرگوں کی نظر سے پیدا

You cannot acquire it from books, nor yet from residence in College. You learn *dīn*—religion, a faith by which to live—from the vision of your elders.

That is only apparently a trite, conventional, conservative statement. If you look at the essence of it, Akbar is saying that you can go through university and read as many books as you like, but it is not so much the content of your academic course as the qualities of those who teach it that help you to learn how to live. Or as he put it in another verse:[126]

کورسس تو لفظ ہی سکھاتے ہیں  آدمی آدمی بناتے ہیں

Courses only teach you words:
It's *men* that make you men.

poet.' *Avadh Punch* was the humorous periodical in which Akbar published much of his verse. Sayyid Akbar Ḥusain was Akbar's full name. The words are those of Muḥammad Yahyā Tanhā, as quoted by Shaikh Muḥammad Ikrām in *Mauj i Kauṣar*, 5th edition, 1963, Ferozsons Ltd., Lahore, etc., p. 213. We cannot find the passage in Tanhā's *Siyar ul Muṣannifīn*, and in his *Mirāt ush Shu'arā*, Vol. II, Shaikh Mubārak 'Alī, Lahore, n.d. [1950], pp. 60–1, his statement is a much more qualified one. Perhaps this was an earlier, and more rash, version of the judgment expressed there. The words quoted by Ikrām are in any case a fair summary of the fairly widely held view of Akbar's 'negativeness'.

[123] Aziz Ahmad, *An Intellectual History of Islam in India*, Edinburgh University Press, 1969, p. 105. His earlier assessment, in his *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857–1964*, Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 101–2 is rather less sweeping.

[124] Cf. H. W. C. Davis, *Medieval Europe*, Williams & Norgate, London, n.d., p. 23.

[125] I, 23, 1.  [126] III, 462.

In another verse he says:[127]

شعر میں اکبر یہی مضمون تو ہر بار باندھ
اے مسلماں سبحہ لے اے برہمن زنّار باندھ

Akbar, in your verse repeat this theme again and again: Muslim, take up your rosary; Brahman, wear your sacred thread.

You could not want a more seemingly conventional, a more seemingly traditional and conservative verse. But whether it *is* so depends entirely upon what, for Akbar, the rosary and the sacred thread symbolize. And there are many verses that make it clear that what they symbolize is not an indiscriminate, unthinking adherence to ancient tradition, but a loyalty to all that is best in it, all that is valuable, and indeed essential, to the conduct of a moral and meaningful life. And it is this kind of loyalty that he means when he writes:[128]

ہم مصلحتِ وقت کے منکر نہیں اکبر  لیکن یہ سمجھ لو کہ وفا بھی ہے کوئی چیز

Akbar does not deny the need for moving with the times
But understand that loyalty has its importance too.

The verse implies a discriminating view of traditional values, changing those that need to be changed, and maintaining those which need to be maintained. One has to look at his verse to see which things fall into which of these two categories. And it is relevant to remember here that Akbar, like most Urdu poets, began as a writer of the ghazal—the traditional lyric form in which classical Urdu verse rises to the height of its achievement. (It has a tradition going right back to the fourteenth century and beyond in Persian verse, a tradition which Akbar and most cultured Indian Muslims of his day knew and valued.) And the ghazal tradition itself is one of rejection of the externals of piety and stress upon the true spirit of religion. There is abundant evidence that Akbar's thought continues this tradition. Thus he writes in one of his verses—and there are more like it—[129]

پنڈت کو بھی سلام ہے اور مولوی کو بھی
مذہب نہ چاہیئے مجھے ایمان چاہیئے

Away with pandits and with maulvis too.
I do not want religion, I want faith.

[127] I, 152, 2. [128] I, 90, 3. [129] II, 48, 20.

And, in more sarcastic tone he notes that anyway the new modernity is not incompatible with an empty observance of religious forms. He depicts the satisfaction of the aspiring modern who makes this discovery:[130]

نئی تہذیب میں دقّت زیادہ تو نہیں ہوتی
مذاہب رہتے ہیں قائم فقط ایمان جاتا ہے

One can accommodate without much trouble to these modern ways.
Religions still remain—all that one loses is one's faith.

The outward sign of being a Muslim is circumcision, but Akbar ridicules the idea that circumcision itself entitles you to call yourself a Muslim. He writes ironically:[131]

ختنہ ہونا بھی ہے مذہب میں بڑی چیز اکبر  بے نمازوں کو بھی دعویٰ ہے مسلمانی کا

It seems that circumcision is the essence of religion:
Men claim that they are Muslims who have never said their prayers.

Another ghazal tradition which he upholds—and this is again one which runs counter to conservative orthodoxy whether in religion or society or politics—is that of what I may call religious humanism. The ghazal poets always judge a man not by his religious professions—not by what he calls himself—but by what his conduct of life shows him to *be*. All men who love their God, no matter what the name they call Him by, and all men who love their fellow-men, regardless of creed and race and custom, are brothers to one another, and the pious Hindu who comes in this category is so to speak a better Muslim than the orthodox Muslim who hates the Hindu because he is an idolator. Akbar's verse abounds in expressions of this outlook:[132]

خدا ہی کی عبادت جن کو ہو مقصود اے اکبر
وہ کیوں باہم لڑیں گو فرق ہو طرزِ عبادت میں

Why should men fight, whose aim it is to worship God?
What matter if they worship him in different forms?

[130] II, 47, 14.
[131] IV, 3, 6. And compare II, 54, 16.
[132] II, 79, 16.

کعبے میں جلوہ گر وہی دیر میں مستتر وہی
لیتے ہیں ہم خدا کا نام کہتے ہیں رام رام بھی

*His* radiance fills the Kaba, *He* lies hidden in the temple.
It is to *Him* we cry, whether as Allah or as Rām.[133]

Rām being one of the many Hindu names for God. As in religion, so in politics. Akbar combats vigorously the kind of religious intolerance which holds up political advance:[134]

اگر مذہب خلل اندازِ ہر ملکی مقاصد میں  تو شیخ و برہمن پنہاں رہیں دیر و مساجد میں

If their religion hinders us in working for our country's good
Shut up the shaikhs and Brahmans in their temples and their mosques.

As a Muslim, it is, quite properly, the Muslim advocates of hostility to other religious communities that he most often attacks. The couplet which was quoted earlier:

But not for me the shaikh jī's policy
Whose final word is 'What the Sahib commands'.

is the second of a short poem of only two couplets: and the first says 'Why should we quarrel with the Hindus. We share the same produce of the same land; and we too—(i.e. we Muslims)—pray for their prosperity.'[135] To those Muslims (and there are still in 1971 all too many of them) who think that because their ancestors conquered India they are superior to the Hindus, he points out that whatever role their ancestors played, *they* aren't playing that role today:[136]

اے بھائیو بابو صاحب سے کھنچنے کا نہیں ہے کوئی محل
گو نسل علاء الدین میں ہو مسکن تو تمہارا غور نہیں

Ala ud Dīn may be your ancestor.
What of it? *You* no longer live in Ghor

and there is no reason for you to hold aloof from your Hindu fellow-countrymen.

He has too much sense to think that Hindus and Muslims will never clash, but he says that such clashes need not shatter their essential

[133] II, 85, 15. [134] II, 79, 4. [135] II, 59, 7–8.
[136] I, 893, 3.

unity. Both have to bear the blows of those who wield the rod of worldly power, but they should respond by being like water, on which the blows of a rod have only a momentary effect:[137]

کہتا ہوں میں ہندو مسلماں سے یہی　　اپنی اپنی روش پہ تم نیک رہو
لاٹھی ہے ہوائے دہر پانی بن جاؤ　　موجوں کی طرح لڑو مگر ایک رہو

I say the same to Hindus and to Muslims:
Be good, each as your faith would have you be.
The world's a rod? Then *you* become as water.
Clash like the waves, but still remain one sea.

He has the sense, too, to realize that in all probability the Hindu majority of India's population is likely to use its preponderance to claim more than its share; but even then, he says, good sense demands that the Muslims stand with them, and not in opposition to them, and so prevent the possibility of a situation arising in which the British and the Hindus join hands against them.[138] Of course there are inconsistencies. In the disputes between Hindi and Urdu, for instance, he suffers from the common Muslim illusion that Urdu is the common language spoken by Muslims and Hindus alike, and that Hindi is a pernicious invention designed to disrupt Hindu–Muslim unity. But even here he does his best. The quarrel between the two tongues, he says (he has a marked fondness for erotic imagery), is like the intertwining of the tongues of two lovers locked in a passionate kiss.[139] The language question, and the delicate question of the sacredness of the cow, he says, are the two main things that come in the way of Hindu–Muslim harmony, remarking ruefully that this *gao zabān* recipe is a troublesome one.[140] This is another pun. *Gao* means cow, and *zabān* means 'tongue' or 'language', and *gao zabān* also means 'cow's tongue'—a dish regarded as a delicacy by Muslims. On the language dispute he hasn't much to offer beyond an appeal to the Hindus to abandon their hostility to Urdu. On the cow he goes further, especially in verses written in the last period of his life when strong cordial feeling between the two communities reached a peak in their parallel, and allied, movements against their British rulers. Akbar expresses sympathy with Muslims who, inspired by this

[137] I, 516.
[138] I, 1155.
[139] E.g. I, 1149, 2; and 1159.
[140] I, 1111.

regard for Hindu susceptibilities, voluntarily abstain from beef. He gives an ingenious argument in support:[141]

حامی ہوا جو گائے کا، بے شک ذہین ہے　　سمجھا یہ دِل میں گائے کے سر پر زمین ہے

If he supports the cow, he shows perception:
He knows it is a cow sustains the world.

—a reference to traditional Muslim cosmography, according to which the foundations of the earth rest upon the horns of a cow.[142]

Another metaphor makes the point that Hindus can hope to win Muslim good will, but not British good will, and that they should therefore make common cause with the Muslims against the British.[143]

بعض مُسلِم تو ایسے ہیں موجود　　منہ جو لحمِ بقر سے موڑتے ہیں
فوجی گورے مگر رکیں کیوں کر　　جان بُل کب گئو کو چھوڑتے ہیں

There are some Muslims who abstain from beef
Treating your tender scruples as their own.
It's British Tommy who will not hold back,
For how can John Bull leave the cows alone?

If Akbar's humanism finds expression in the traditional ghazal doctrine of mutual love between the sincere Muslim and the sincere Hindu, it finds expression also in another traditional ghazal theme—the theme of sympathy for the poor and hostility to the rich and powerful. It is worth remarking that unlike Sir Sayyid and his main lieutenants, Akbar was not an aristocrat, but the son of a respectable, but none too affluent, Muslim family from a country town,[144] and his sense of kinship with the ordinary man never left him. We have seen how he scourges the pillars of the New Light for being, as one of his verses puts it,[145] 'stiff with pride in the presence of their Indian brothers, but cringing like a coolie before the foreigner'. The poor make up the great majority of our people, he says—and yet the pillars of the New Light don't want

[141] IV, 52, 16.

[142] Indian Muslim tradition was that the earth rests on the horns of a cow. Cf. (e.g.) Mīr Anīs, *marṣiya* beginning *jab qat'a kī musāfat i shab āftāb ne*, stanza 167 in Mas'ūd Ḥasan Riẓvī's text in *Rūḥ i Anīs*, second edition, Kitāb Nagar, Lucknow, 1956, p. 253, and footnote 3.

[143] III, 1421.

[144] Qamar ud Dīn Aḥmad, *Bazm-i-Akbar*. Anjuman-i-Taraqqi-i-Urdū, Delhi, second edition, 1944, pp. 15–17.

[145] I, 948, 1.

to have anything to do with them. Their complacent aping of the West means nothing to the poor; while for them it is the be-all and end-all of their existence.[146]

غربا بھی ہیں مگر قوم کے اجزا اکثر　　غربا ہی سے تعلق میں ہے ان کو تو مفر
دور ہے اُن سے خود آرائیِ مغرب کا اثر　　بحث اُن کی بھی اسی بات پہ ہے ختم مگر

They should not exaggerate the importance of *their* advancement to the advancement of their community:[147]

سو سے جو سو پچاس کو اچھے ملے تو کیا　　قائم نہ ہوگی قوم کبھی سو پچاس سے

If fifty to a hundred of them get good posts, what of it?
No nation yet was ever based on fifty to a hundred.

You too are 'natives', he tells them, just like us:[148]

نیٹو بھی رہو گے اور مرو گے بھی ضرور　　کہتا ہوں کہ دعویٰ خدائی نہ کرو

Natives you are, and natives you will die.
Remember that, and don't think you are God.

And he uses a modern metaphor to remind them of one of the basic teachings of their religion. Gentlemen, he says, don't despise those who travel third class. It's the same engine that's hauling all of us to our destination. Your first and second class last only to the terminus of the grave. After that a man's class will be determined by the kind of life he has led.[149]

سمجھیں نہ حضور تھرڈ والوں کو حقیر　　انجن تو وہی ہے جس کی ہم سب کو ہے آس
اسٹیشنِ گور تک ہے یہ فسٹ و سکنڈ　　بعد اس کے موافق عمل ہوگا کلاس

In much the same spirit he hits at the British too. In India, Afghanistan is known as the country from which pomegranates come. When Lord

[146] II, 61, 5–6.
[147] II, 87, 16.
[148] I, 1135, 2.
[149] III, 1190.

Minto invited the Emir of Afghanistan to visit India Akbar commented:[150]

جو سچی بات ہے کہدوں گا بے خوف و خطر اس کو　　نہیں رکنے کا میں ہرگز پری ٹوکے کہ جن ٹوکے
انار آتے جو کابل کے تو پڑتے سب کے حصے میں　　امیر آئے تو ہم کو کیا مزے ہیں لارڈ منٹو کے

Akbar will always speak the truth boldly and fearlessly
And never hesitate to say what he thinks just and fair.
Afghanistan's Emir has come. That gives Lord Minto pleasure.
Had it been pomegranates we could *all* have had a share.

And in more serious tone he says that no man knows what is his role in God's creation, but that heavenly reward lies concealed in the hunger and thirst of the poor:[151]

ثواب کہتا ہے مل جاؤں گا کر ان کی مدد　　چھپا ہوا میں غریبوں کی بھوک پیاس میں ہوں

—that is, if you help those among you who hunger and thirst you will have your reward in heaven.

Akbar then is concerned with *everyone*, not just with the rich and influential élites of his community. And he hopes for those changes in the thought and spirit of all of them which can alone give them a strong united will [152] and make them once more capable of becoming the masters of their own destiny. What his people need above all are firm principles,[153] without which one simply moves with the world and lacks all capacity for changing it. He asks the leaders of the New Light:[154]

ناز کیا اس پہ جو بدلا ہے زمانے نے تمھیں　　مرد وہ ہیں جو زمانے کو بدل دیتے ہیں

Why feel so proud because the times have changed you?
True men are those whose efforts change the times

and until they have the firm faith, and the sources of spiritual strength that enables them to do this, he says,[155]

قیامت تک وہ سرداری کے قابل ہو نہیں سکتے

Doomsday will come before they are fit to rule.

[150] III, 1455.
[151] III, 364, 2.
[152] II, 26, 14, and I, 534, 1.
[153] II, 26, 17–18.
[154] I, 124, 2.
[155] II, 26, 18.

This faith they need can only be a religious faith, and that, too, of the kind which he and his predecessors in the ghazal tradition uphold—a faith which condemns formalism and bigotry, stresses the spiritual content of religion, and inculcates the love of *all* men as fundamental to the truly religious life. As often, he appeals to the experience of the West to support his argument. The British, whom you so admire, he tells the moderns, still have their Christian faith, while you, with your merely superficial Westernism, have lost yours:[156]

درس تھا یکساں مگر وہ تو مسیحی ہی رہے
تجھ پہ مذہب کے عوض شیطاں کا قابو ہو گیا
ایک ہی بوتل سے پی ہوٹل میں دونوں نے شراب
لطف مستی اُن کو آیا اور تو اُلّو ہو گیا

Taught the same lessons, he, the Christian, kept his faith
While you have lost yours, and succumbed to Satan's spell.
His the intoxication—yours the sottishness—
From wine from the same bottle, in the same hotel.

But his argument—just as well, perhaps—doesn't rest upon the appeal to English experience.

Clear principles and a unifying faith will teach the Muslims discrimination, a quality in which the champions of the Old Light and the champions of the New are both lacking, the first championing the old just because it *is* old, and the second championing the new just because it is new. He tells them both, in a verse about which you have to think a little before you see its point:[157]

بحثِ کہن و نو میں سمجھتا نہیں اکبرؔ جو ذرّہ ہے موجود ہے وہ روزِ ازل سے

Akbar, I do not understand this argument of old and new
For every atom that exists existed from eternity.

By which he means oldness and newness is no argument; what one has to decide is not between old and new but between good and bad. He feels himself very much caught between the anger of those who hate

[156] I, 844.
[157] I, 240, 7.

everything old and the equal anger of those who hate everything new, and expresses his predicament in a humorous verse:[158]

تہمد پہ ہے شبہ و حقارت کی نظر
پتلون پہ غصہ و شرارت کی نظر
بہتر ہے یہی برہنہ پھرئیے اکبر
شاید پڑ جائے انکی رغبت کی نظر

I wear a loincloth—and am looked at with suspicion and contempt.
I put on trousers—and arouse men's anger and hostility.
Perhaps I'd better drop them both and go around with nothing on.
Then maybe men will feel my charm and I shall feel their sympathy.

Many other verses make the same sort of point more seriously, attacking undiscriminating attitudes on both sides. He tells the indiscriminate advocates of reform:[159]

ہمیں گھیرے ہوئے ہیں ہر طرف اصلاح کی موجیں  مگر یہ حس نہیں ہے ڈوبتے ہیں یا ابھرتے ہیں

Waves of reform are raging on all sides
But where are we? Sinking or surfacing?

Or, in another metaphor, he says that they are like men watching an operation, who are so fascinated by the movements of the lancet that they do not notice that the patient is dying:[160]

خوشی ہے سب کو کہ آپریشن میں خوب نشتر یہ چل رہا ہے
کسی کو اس کی خبر نہیں ہے، مریض کا دم نکل رہا ہے

We have already seen something of how *he* discriminates, how *he* decides what to accept and what to reject in the teachings of the modern school. Akbar criticizes the New Light not only because it rejects too much of the past but also because it contents itself with too little of the new. Some of his most savage verse is directed against those complacent 'brown Englishmen' who think that because they despise their own people, learn English, wear English dress, leave the 'native' city and live in a bungalow with the Sahibs in their cantonment, they *are* virtually English. Really? Akbar asks them sarcastically. Does

[158] I, 1059. [159] II, 96, 5. [160] II, 37, 10.

English blood run in your veins?[161] Do you think any Englishman can be your uncle?[162] Is the world as impressed with *you* as it is with the English?[163] If half your faults come from the senseless, wholesale rejection of everything in your own traditions and the equally senseless, wholesale enthusiasm for everything Western, the other half are due to the fact that you do not even begin to understand what are the things that have made the British a great and powerful nation, let alone acquiring those things yourself. A real grasp of modern science and modern skills, and a drive to develop trade and industry—these are the things that made the British great, and these are the things in which you must follow their example if you really want to become a modern people. And don't deceive yourselves: this isn't what the British want for you. You'll have to do it yourselves, and against British opposition. In much of his verse he uses the metaphor of the railway locomotive. The engine rushes past, puffing out clouds of smoke that darken the air —its speed and power symbolic of Europe's advance, and the smoke symbolic of the darkness of ignorance in which it wants to keep Asia sleeping.[164] Or in another view of the same scene,[165] the engine comes and passes us with a rush, and we hear some vague words from them about 'water and fire' and 'steam'. And for *this* they expect us to sing the praises of Europe's generosity to us! Akbar concludes:

No: let them teach us everything they know.
*Then* we will give thanks for their kindness to us.

انجن آیا نکل گیا زن سے  سن لیا نام آگ پانی کا
بات اتنی اور اس پہ یہ طومار  غل ہے یورپ کی جاں فشانی کا
علم پورا ہمیں سکھائیں اگر  تب کریں شکر مہربانی کا

But they won't do that, he says. We are far from the shore, and the storms rage and the waves rise high and our ship is breaking up, but the English won't give us their steamships.[166] If you want to acquire modern knowledge adequately it will have to be by your own efforts. *Make* that effort, and don't think that because you've got the money to buy cars to drive around in, that makes you a modern man. You'll have to exert yourself, face difficulties, go to other countries for the knowledge which the British deny you, and persist against all the pressures they can bring to bear to stop you. (And here, he says, it

[161] I, 576. [162] I, 201, 2. [163] II, 92, 13.
[164] I, 1143. [165] I, 54, 12–14. [166] II, 52, 3–4.

would do no harm to learn something from the Hindus about the effectiveness of agitation.)[167]

عزم کر تقلید مغرب کا ہنر کے زور سے — لُطف کیا ہے لد لیئے موٹر پہ زر کے زور سے
غیر ملکوں میں ہنر کو سیکھ تکلیفیں اُٹھا — روکتے ہیں وہ اگر اپنے اثر کے زور سے
بابوؤں کا کام نکلا شور و شر کے زور سے — .....

This will lay the basis for your developing trade and industry. It is trade that makes the European nations so strong.[168] The trader (*tājir*) is king these days, for does he not wear the crown (*tāj*) on his head? (i.e. does not the word *tāj* stand at the head (beginning) of the word *tājir*?).[169]

ہے تجارت واقعی اک سلطنت — زور یورپ کو اسی کا آج ہے
لفظ تاجر خود ہی اے اکبر ثبوت — دیکھ لو تاجر کے سر پر تاج ہے

When we turn our backs on trade and prefer government service we contribute to our own decline.[170] And industry will make our country prosperous. 'Ply the mattocks of industry to clear the jungles of poverty.'[171] Not that you will be able to achieve all this before you are free,[172] for slavery saps the slave's morale,[173] but this is the path you must take.

And what, meanwhile, should be your attitude to the current realities of your situation? First to *recognize* realities, and not give yourselves illusions about them. For example, realize that the British hold all real power in their hands, and that you are nothing in comparison with them, for all your pathetic pride in your membership of committees and councils. He describes the situation of such a member puzzled because the British don't treat him with proper respect.[174]

جو پوچھا میں نے "حضرت میری عزت کیوں نہیں کرتے"
تو وہ بولے کہ "تم اظہارِ قوت کیوں نہیں کرتے"

I asked him, 'Sir, why don't you show me honour?'
He answered me, 'Why don't you show your power?'

[167] II, 87, 7–9. [168] I, 644, 2. Cf. II, 63, 9. [169] I, 644, 3.
[170] II, 31, 2. [171] I, 687, 60. [172] II, 26, 15.
[173] III, 819. [174] IV, 47, 21.

It's strength that alone commands respect, Akbar says:[175]

زورِ بازو نہیں تو کیا اسپیچ ہاتھ بھی دے خدا زبان کے ساتھ

If you lack strength, what is the good of speeches?
God give us a strong arm, not just a tongue.

Secondly, maintain your dignity and self-respect. Rather than ride a mount whose reins are in the hands of another, it's better to walk.[176] Be yourself, and behave in the way your position demands:[177]

میں رعیّت ہوں وہ شاہانہ دلیری ہے کہاں
مجھ کو کیوں رشک آئے وضعِ ملّت انگریز پر

I am their subject; why should *I* give myself lordly airs?
I do not need to envy them the way that *they* behave.

Well, but a man must live, they argue. Of course he must, Akbar replies, but do only what the need to earn a living compels you to do, and don't get involved in anything beyond that.[178]

طلبِ رزق ضروری سے تو مجبوری ہے اس کے آگے ہے جو کچھ اس سے مجھے دوری ہے

Am I not to aspire to worldly success then, he is asked? There's not necessarily any harm in that, says Akbar, but your attitude to the world should be like the Englishman's attitude to the Indian—the 'native'. Some relationship is necessary, but the less you have to do with him the better.[179]

اکبر سے میں نے پوچھا اے واعظِ طریقت دُنیائے دوں سے رکھوں میں کس قدر تعلّق
اُس نے دیا بلاغت سے یہ جواب مجھ کو انگریز کو ہے نیٹو سے جس قدر تعلّق

*Conclusion*

Beyond this we must admit that he hasn't much positive advice to offer. But then he's a poet, not a politician; he defines general attitudes; he doesn't prescribe detailed courses of political action. This is partly because he is himself uncertain. He feels keenly the overwhelming

[175] III, 540, 1. [176] I, 813. And cf. I, 1205, 4. [177] I, 875, 2.
[178] II, 108, 17. [179] III, 1068.

preponderance of British power, and he knows that power is decisive in human affairs in *all* parts of the world, not just in India. In one verse he applauds the blunt way in which the German Kaiser stated this truth when he told the Pope[180]

وعظ ہم بھی کہتے ہیں لیکن دہان توپ سے

I too preach sermons—from the cannon's mouth.

He feels too not only the ineffectiveness, but the cheapness and lack of dignity in the policies that find favour with the Muslims. On the other hand the more militant behaviour of the Hindu politicians, while it occasionally appeals to him (as we saw a moment ago), generally frightens him, because it provokes an equally militant, and much more powerful reaction from the British.[181] He sometimes feels tempted to turn his back on public affairs, retire into his own shell, and advise others to do the same. In one of his poems[182] he incorporates a famous verse of the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hāfiz

رموزِ مملکتِ خویش خسرواں دانند گدائے گوشہ نشینی تو حافظا مخروش

The secrets of their states are known to kings alone
Sit in your corner, Hāfiz. Why bestir yourself?

And in verse of his own he puts the alternatives like this:[183]

یا امیٹیشن کے صدقے چائے دودھ اور کھانڈ لے
یا ایجی ٹیشن کے بدلے تو چلا جا مانڈلے
یا قناعت اور طاعت میں بسر کر زندگی
رزق کی کشتی کو کھے، پتوار لے اور ڈانڈ لے

Go in for imitation and take milk and sugar and tea
Or take to agitation—and get sent to Mandalay
Or earn your bread and be content, and live as God commands.
Row your own boat; take up the oars; propel it on its way.

It was only perhaps in the last ten to fifteen years of his life that his attitudes began to change very markedly, and that, although never

[180] I, 975. [181] I, 739.
[182] I, 617, 3. [183] I, 790.

entirely free of misgivings, he began to look with sympathy on mass political activities, and indeed to cherish hopes of worthwhile results from them. This change came about under the impact of events outside India which changed the whole mood of Indian Muslims. From about 1910 there began a period of rapid expansion of European powers—not only, or even mainly, British, but French, Italian and Russian—against the Muslim countries of the Middle East, and Indian Muslims reacted with a growing anger and indignation which turned them more and more against their British rulers. Akbar's verses reflect their helpless rage. In one he writes (doing the same violence to the standard Urdu pronunciation of 'Turks' as I do in my translation to the standard English pronunciation of 'clerk'):[184]

پیٹ مصروف ہے کلرکی میں  دِل ہے ایران اور ٹرکی میں

Our belly keeps us working with the clerks
Our heart is with the Persians and the Turks

—'our belly' meaning 'our need to earn a living'.
And he writes: 'We have no license to bear arms, no power to go and fight against Turkey's enemies. But we curse them from the bottom of our hearts, and pray that the worms may eat Italy's guns.'[185]

نہ لیسنس ہتھیار کا ہے نہ زور
کہ ٹرکی کے دُشمن سے جا کر لڑیں
تہِ دِل سے ہم کوستے ہیں مگر
کہ اٹلی کی توپوں میں کیڑے پڑیں

Ideas which Akbar had pioneered now became more and more widely held. Mass feeling rose steadily from about 1910 to the early 1920s, culminating in the later years of the period in the Khilāfat Movement, and, in formal alliance with it, the first big non-cooperation movement of the Indian National Congress under Gandhi's leadership—the two allied movements forming together perhaps the first and the last modern mass movement to embrace Hindus and Muslims alike. Akbar responded with admiration, and even enthusiasm, both for the movement and for its leaders.

[184] III, 1420.  [185] II, 57, 14–15.

He says proudly:[186]

ہم وہ لقمہ ہیں کہ ہرگز نہ پچیں گے اُن کو

We are a mouthful they can *never* digest!

He knew quite well what forces had brought these united movements into being. (The 'Maulānā' of the verse in which he states his judgment is almost certainly Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī.) He writes:[187]

نہ مولانا میں لغزش ہے نہ سازش کی ہے گاندھی نے
چلایا ایک رُخ اُن کو فقط مغرب کی آندھی نے

Maulānā has not blundered, nor has Gandhi hatched conspiracies;
What blows them on the same course is the gale of Western policies.

Gandhi gets high praise as the man who can keep the lamp of the East burning even in the Western blast.[188] His very name is auspicious, for, says Akbar, from its letters you can form the words *an* meaning food, *gāe* meaning cow, *dahī*, meaning yoghurt and *ghī* meaning clarified butter.[189] And he is changing the course of history:[190]

اِنقلاب آیا، نئی دُنیا، نیا ہنگامہ ہے
شاہ نامہ ہو چکا اب وقتِ گاندھی نامہ ہے

Times change; new movements, a new world succeeds the old.
The tale of kings is ended; Gandhi's tale is being told.

But it does not last. Akbar reflects an increasing Muslim impatience and indeed contempt for what they see as Gandhi's lack of courage, his meekness in the face of British oppression and his readiness to abandon his allies to compromise with his, and their, enemies. He jeers at him and those who follow his lead:[191]

نہ صاحب کو مارو نہ صاحب سے بھاگو
مچاتے رہو غُل، پٹو اور مانگو

Don't strike the Sahibs: don't run away from them.
Keep shouting, taking thrashings, and petitioning

[186] IV, 64, 11. [187] IV, 48, 4. [188] IV, 91, 10–11.
[189] IV, 48, 3. [190] IV, 46, 1. [191] IV, 40, 7.

and, in a remarkably bitter verse:[192]

ہوں مبارک حضور کو گاندھی ایسے دشمن نصیب ہوں کس کو
کہ پٹیں خوب اور سر نہ اٹھائیں اور کھسک جائیں، جب کہو کھسکو

The British can have Gandhi, and most welcome!
What luck they have!—to find an enemy
Who'll take a thorough beating without stirring
And when they shout 'Away!' will slink away.

And he reaches the conclusion in the end[193]

جے کی بھی صدا آئے گی چرخے بھی چلیں گے لیکن یہ سمجھ لیجئے صاحب نہ ٹلیں گے

Let acclamations sound, and keep on spinning all you will
But mark my words: When all is done, the Sahibs will be here still.

The verse of Akbar's last period has been deliberately dealt with more briefly because taken as a whole it is of a piece with his earlier work, and simply expresses in new conditions the outlook which has already been described, wrapping, as always, the cloak of humour around the beauty of meaning to protect it from the cold, or, as he puts it in another verse, preferring to talk 'nonsense' that will attract people's attention and please them, rather than give sermons which are a trial to listen to:[194]

بار خاطر ہو تو واعظ کا بھی ارشاد بُرا
دل کو بھا جائے تو اکبر کی خُرافات اچھی

I hope I have said enough to show that he is *not* the wooden, unimaginative, unthinking, obstinate conservative that some have made him out to be—trying to hold back progress and even to put back the clock. There are indeed verses that can be interpreted in this way, and even a few—I would not attempt to deny it—which *must* be read in this way and cannot be interpreted in any other.[195] But these do not rep-

[192] IV, 42, 4–5.

[193] IV, 51, 7–8. Cf. also his despondent reflections on the shooting at Amritsar, IV, 78, 5–6 and 96, 8–11.

[194] I, 166, 10.

[195] The most celebrated is I, 1030, in which he complains of having to drink piped water and read printed type. Cf. also his complaint against electric light, IV, 65, 16.

resent the essential Akbar. Essentially he is a man intensely aware of change, and of the irresistibility of change.[196] He knows the need for change and for adaptation to it—but he is aware also that when great changes take place in the life of a people much that is good is swept away with much that is bad. He accepts all that is good in the new, is more or less indifferent to what is in itself neither bad nor good but merely neutral, and exerts what effort he can bring to bear to preserve and carry forward into the new conditions all that he values in the old as well. And all who feel that Islam and its culture have given the world something which it should not lose will respond to his appeal.

[196] Cf. (e.g.) II, 83, 4–5, and the complete poem (13 couplets), I, 247.