



THE MODERNITY IN COLONIAL INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF AKBAR ALLAHABADI'S POETRY

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Abstract:

Akbar Allahabadi is a poet in the Urdu poetic tradition who, through his creative consciousness, revealed the inner layers of colonialism. The environment in which Akbar's poetry thrives is in colonial India, where he and other political and social leaders of his time are loyal to the British government. The historical context in which his poetry presents its meaning is the scenario of the beginning of the nineteenth century in India when it was a time of flux for the Muslim community. After the Revolt of 1857, Muslims, in particular, had been the subject of attack by British rulers. Many were forced to abandon Delhi and others were not allowed to enter the city. In the wake of this crisis, the community adopted two opposing ideologies. While one group was staunchly hostile towards the British, the other saw a benefit in collaborating with the benefactors. The latter—called supporters of the 'new light'—believed in adopting British culture as modern. This bothered Urdu poet and satirist Akbar Allahabadi (1846–1921), as he lamented the loss of culture that would come with imitation of the British way of life. He took to his trusted weapon—satirical poetry—to critique this trend. the post-1857 era of peace and reform and the beginning and the end of the First World War. Although the concept of history is not very clear in his poetry, the external conditions which influenced his poetic temperament cannot be understood without being detached from history. Akbar interprets the cultural conditions of the age with his poetic consciousness. This article seeks to study Akbar's poetry from a Postcolonial perspective.



Key Words: Poetry, Colonialism, British culture, Modern Education, Criticism

Akbar Allahabadi was a powerful and courageous poet of the Indian language and Indian culture. His speech found all the mental and moral values, cultural achievements, and political movements of the people living in northern Hindustan. Akbar's poetry is a mirror of time and life. His style is sometimes Qalandarana, poetic, sometimes simple, sometimes traditional, and sometimes innovative and revolutionary. Akbar was traditional yet rebellious and revolutionary yet reformist. He was a poet; he did not make a loud noise. Both the gentry and the public considered him their poet. His poetry irrigates the taste of both. His poetry is complete Urdu poetry. According to Shams-ur-Rahman Farooqi, after Mir Taqi Mir, Akbar Allahabadi used most words of the Urdu language in his speech. During his tenure, he did not pay heed to the Muslim clerics, nor was he enamored by the blessings of the West, nor did he care about the British rulers. As an employee of the British, no one in that era criticized the West extensively. Akbar is considered to be the king of satirical elegance in Urdu poetry. Before him, humor in Urdu poetry, apart from satire, could not gain any importance and continuity. We know a few things about Akbar Allahabadi. We can divide them into two parts and briefly describe them,

- (1) Akbar was a great poet of humor.
 - (2) He was a freedom fighter.
 - (3) Though he did not raise the flag in opposition to the British, he wrote many anti-British things.
- The second part contains the following,

- (1) He was against progress, that is, against English education. (Rahman, 1964)
- (2) He was against not only English education but all modern things, such as railways, printing press, telephone, industry and handicrafts, and knowledge.
- (3) He was opposed to the institutions of modern civilization, such as the political party, conference, council, council membership, etc., although these things were the precursors of freedom for us. (Rahman, 1964)
- (4) He was also against Women's education and freedom.
- (5) He was a reactionary, an enemy of the new light (knowledge), and today his poetry is irrelevant.

If not all of the above, most of the things are also said by Akbar's supporters; that is, Akbar was a funny satirical comic poet, but his message is now meaningless if not harmful. Qamar Raees has also said recently that Akbar Allahabadi cannot compete with Akbar because Josh is a much greater poet than Akbar. Another thing on which both Akbar's admirers and his critics agree is that satirical poetry does not last long. When the reasons for the satire are gone, the comic loses its power and meaning. Akbar's tragedy is that he spent most of his creative energy on humor. If the problems he made the subject of his satire did not exist anymore, then that satire was no longer; it remained only a book talk. (Daryabadi, 1987)

Akbar is among the five most significant poets of Urdu literature. Akbar holds a very high place in



the satirical literature of the world. I think that Akbar has not received enough justice. The superficial reading of his poetry has led many of us to conclude that he was a conservative older man. Although he had the spirit of freedom and used his humor to bring social reform, he did not realize that reform and progress go hand in hand. There can be no reform if you are against development. On the contrary, there is a belief that Akbar was the first person who was well aware of the changing times, and the threat of English imperialism to his cultural values because of their English education and development as powerful weapons. (Ibid, n.d.)

Mahatma Gandhi and Iqbal are next to him in this matter. Because Akbar was born in 1846, Mahatma Gandhi in 1869, and Iqbal in 1877. The same cultural crisis that Akbar felt and based on which he accursed the symbols of English imperialism. This article intends to describe a slightly different subject, that is, Akbar was not only against the slavery of nations, but he was against the colonial system, and he realized many fundamental dangers inherent in capitalism and Colonialism. He was not merely anti-British, nor was he opposed to Western civilization merely out of conservatism. (Talib, 1996)

A seminar was held in Allahabad on Akbar Allahabadi and the colonial experience. In this seminar, Fazeel Jafari proved Akbar not just a traditional conservative but an enlightened nationalist. Famous Hindi critic Rajendra Kumar, in his article, mentioned Mahatma Gandhi's book *Hind Swaraj* published in 1908, in which Gandhiji said many things about railways and telegram, etc., that Akbar used to say.

Rajendra Kumar also mentioned Mahatma Gandhi's earlier Marathi book "*Deshir Katha*," published in 1904, whose author Ganesh Sakharam Devaskar also referred to the telegram, rail, and modern means of trade as means of tactics of the Raj and these resources expanded and strengthened the power of the colonial ruler. (Ibid, n.d.)

Rajendra Kumar is not saying that Mahatma Gandhi and Ganesh Sukha Ramdevskar would have read Akbar. The point is that Akbar was aware of the destructive forces of the colonial and imperialist system. Otherwise, he would not have stated this:

پانی پینا پڑا ہے پائپ کا
حرف پڑھنا پڑا ہے ٹائپ کا
پیٹ چلتا ہے آنکھ آئی ہے
شاہ ایڈورڈ کی دہائی ہے (Allahabadi, Muaktubat -i-Akbar, 1967)

The first greatness of Akbar lies in the fact that both Mahatma Gandhi and Iqbal saw the West and its civilization and education directly and very closely. Akbar understood the symbols and implications of this civilization and education without visiting the West. It is correct to accuse Akbar that he was against women's education and freedom, but the fact is he was against English education for women; he was not against education at all. The Indian Muslims thought that Akbar was not the only one



guilty of this. Iqbal's famous piece can be mentioned here as evidence,

لڑکیاں پڑھ رہی ہیں انگریزی
ڈھونڈلی قوم نے فلاح کی راہ
روش مغربی ہے مد نظر
وضع مشرق کو جانتے ہیں گناہ
یہ ڈراما دکھائے گا کیا سین
(Talib, 1996) پردہ اٹھنے کی منتظر ہے نگاہ

Although I have to disagree with Akbar's views on education and women's freedom, these views were prevalent in those times. Akbar's greatness lies in the things that only he saw and felt first. According to Muhammad Hasan Askari, Akbar saw the conflict between East and West not only from India but from the perspective of the whole of Asia (and, in today's language, the third world). For Western civilization, Akbar coined words such as "Brigade," Camp, Cannon, Engine, etc., which command symbols and whose operation we can still see today. (Ibid, n.d.)

By brigade, he meant Indians loyal to the British; by camp, he meant Western society. The cannon, an expression of colonial power, and the engine are metaphors for how that power is disseminated. Askari Sahib rightly said that Akbar was the only person in that era who saw metaphors and symbols in the things brought by the British, and there was no one except Akbar who gave the status of "sign" to "symbol."

The opposition to the Maghrib, or the British, is under Akbar's complete system of thought. This is not a fashionable, trending attitude. His first complaint about Western education was that it does not make a man a "master of heart" but only a "Master of a job." Akbar must not have been aware of Lord Macaulay's note which he wrote in 1835, that by teaching English to Indians, we would create a race that would be black in color but English in the heart so that we can make it our own. But there is no doubt that Akbar was fully aware of the implications of the English policy on Western education. See Akbar's views on the new education, (Ahmed, 1964)

نئی تعلیم کو کیا واسطہ ہے آدمیت سے
جناب ڈارون کو حضرت آدم سے کیا مطلب (Akbar, 1988)

Iqbal's couplet comes to mind here

آدمیت احترام آدمی
باخبر شو از مقام آدمی (Iqbal, Armaghan-e-Aijaz, 1987)

Modern education curriculum makes people gentlemen, not men; humane education with spiritual and mental disposition is required for this work.



کورس تو لفظ ہی سکھاتے ہیں
آدمی آدمی بناتے ہیں
جستجو ہم کو آدمی کی ہے
(Ibid, n.d.) وہ کتابیں عبث منگاتے ہیں

Books do not make a man because the spirit of humanity and the distinction between right and wrong is not attributed to colonial education. It is a Mindless Machine that has been imposed on us. (Rahman, 1964)

آگے انجن کے دین ہے کیا چیز
(Akbar, 1988) بھینس کے آگے بین ہے کیا چیز

Here the engine is a metaphor for the indiscriminate force of colonial imperial power, and religion is a metaphor for Eastern spirituality. The two have the same relationship as the buffalo and the flute. The following two verses of Akbar on humanity are worth remembering. Victorian education and philosophy taught Western civilization and life and knowledge were all on the path of progress. Since Nature gives the right to live to the strongest, the development of Western civilization proves that the West is the most advanced. On this, Akbar says,

یا الہی یہ کیسے بندر ہیں
(Ibid, n.d.) ارتقا پر بھی آدمی نہ ہوئے

Akbar's couplet is,

کتاب دل فقط کافی ہے اکبر درس حکمت کو
(Ibid, n.d.) میں اسپنسر سے مستغنی ہوں مجھ سے مل نہیں ملتا

Herbert Spencer supported materialist philosophy, and John Stuart Mill's most important book was On Liberty. Science and commerce thrived on the reliance on materialism, and nations were enslaved under the pretense of freedom under the front that they were not yet worthy of the space we were discussing and wanted to establish. Similar theories gave rise to phrases like the White Man's Burden. Addressing both Europeans and Asians. Akbar says,

عیسیٰ نے دل روشن کو لیا اور تم نے فقط انجن کو لیا
(Mukerjee, 1974) کہتے ہو کہ وہ تھے باپ سے خوش اور تم ہو خالی بھاپ سے خوش

Consider the words "vacuum" and "steam." Steam is hot air; in English, nonsense is called Hot air. The meaning of steam is also vapor, and it is said that everything in the place where the modern nuclear bomb will fall will be vaporized. Even before the atomic bomb, some bombs could blacken a small area into steam. The meaning of empty steam is now clearly unreal and devoid of meaning. After "Kitab Dil," "Dil Roshan," now listen to Akbar about "Ruh Ki Rah Mustaqeem."



برق وبخارات کا زور اے حکیم
کب بے پئے روح رہ مستقیم
تار پہ جاتے نہیں اہل نظر
ریل سے کھنچتا نہیں قلب سلیم (Ibid, n.d.)

After "Ruh Ki Rah Mustaqeem," Akbar only talks about the soul and the intellect, and modern education has made both of them, i.e., the soul and the intellect, slaves to Western principles.

عقل سپرد ماسٹر مال سپرد آنجناب
جان سپرد ڈاکٹر روح سپرد ڈارون (Mukerjee, 1974)

As Titus Burckhardt has said, the education of earlier times first taught man "Wisdom" and then brought him to perfection. Akbar says that modern education only makes us market goods and makes us government servants. Keep Macaulay's words in mind and listen to this verse,

تعلیم جو دی جاتی ہے ہمیں وہ کیا ہے فقط بازاری ہے
جو عقل سکھائی جاتی ہے وہ کیا ہے فقط سرکاری ہے (Allahabadi, Kulliyat, 1997)

Why should this market knowledge and this intellect not be official, when the actual situation is that,

اس کا پیسینا ہے اور اس کے ہیں بھپارے
یورپ نے ایشیا کو انجن پہ رکھ لیا ہے (Ibid, n.d.)

The proverb is "Put on the sword." Akbar sees the whole East riding on the Western engine as if Europe has put the East on the sword of its industry and craft or loaded it like goods. Very fitting, that is,

مال گاڑی پہ بھروسا ہے جنہیں اے اکبر
ان کو کیا غم ہے گناہوں کی گراں باری کا (Ibid, n.d.)

In other words, the real thing is property and transportation, but it was about education. What this education imparts to the Indian or Asiatic mind, hear from Akbar,

پیری سے کمر خم ہے پہ فرماتے ہیں تن جا
قابو میں نہیں ہاتھ تو کیا ہو سکے پنچہ
وسعت ہے در علم میں ہے راہ عمل بند
ہے صاف سڑک پاؤں پہ لیکن ہے شکنجہ (Allahabadi, Kulliyat, 1997)

That is, this education can sharpen the mind, but it does not give the intellect the ability to use this knowledge. Along with education, the colonial ruler also puts shackles on the feet to lose the power of action. Akbar has said some surprisingly modern things on this subject. Here is Akbar's one verse and one rubai.



دیا سلائی کی تیزی تو آگئی ہم میں
کس یہی ہے کہ ڈبیا انہیں گی جیب میں ہے

Note the word "تیزی". Now, look at the Rubaai,

اکبر مجھے شک نہیں تری تیزی میں
اور تیرے بیان کی دل آویزی میں
شیطان عربی سے بند میں ہے بے خوف
(Robinson, 1974) لاحول کا ترجمہ کر انگریزی میں

There is irony on both sides in the suggestion to translate Lahool into English. A mockery of the Indian that he does not know how to explain the merits of the ancient sciences to the Englishman and has forgotten his powers, and a mockery of the Englishman, that he cannot understand anyone but himself. Akbar was aware of what is now known as Stockholm Syndrome, a situation of confinement and coercion in which a prisoner develops an attachment to his captor, even kidnapping or the prisoner himself. He begins to consider his abductor or captor and himself to be the same, i.e.; he begins to identify with him. This situation exists even today as Western nations are exploiting the third world, and the people of the third world are dying for them. Akbar says,

مٹاتے ہیں جو وہ ہم کو تو اپنا کام کرتے ہیں
مجھے حیرت تو ان پر ہے جو اس مٹتے پہ مٹتے ہیں
اور یہ دل بلا دینے والا شعر بھی ملاحظہ ہو،
کس رہے ہیں اپنی منقاروں سے حلقہ جال کا
(Allahabadi, Kulliyat, 1997) طائروں پر سحر ہے صیاد کے اقبال کا

Here again, Iqbal's poem in "Khidr Rah" comes to mind (Iqbal, Bang-e-Dara, 1962)

خواب سے بیدار ہوتا ہے ذرا محکوم اگر
پھر سلا دیتی ہے اس کو حکمران کی ساحری
یہ دو شعر بھی یاد رکھنے کے قابل ہیں،
قتل سے پہلے ہے کلو وفارم
شکر ہے ان کی مہربانی کا
ہزاروں ہی طریقوں سے ہم انگریزوں کو گھیرے ہیں
طواف ان کے گھروں کا ہے انہیں سڑکوں کے پھیرے ہیں

And now listen to the prayers of the prisoner,

اے خدا مجھ کو کر دے صاحب لوگ
دور ہو مجھ سے اس جنم کا روگ
میرا قالب ہو قالب غربی
بھول جاؤں زبان بھی اپنی



رنگ چہرے کا میرے جائے بدل
کروں ایجاد میں بھی توپ و رفل
سو کے اٹھوں جو آج صبح کو میں
(Ibid, n.d.) لوگ سمجھیں کہ لاٹ صاحب ہیں

The attempt of the subjugated is always to align himself with the ruler. Still, Akbar goes beyond this and says in the language of Munajati that I, too, could invent weapons and means of destruction like my ruler and the army. I could make other nations my slaves. That is, the colonial ruler colors both the body and the soul of his subjugated in his destructive color. Bureaucracy is a form of this unity of the ruler and the subject. In the bureaucracy, the subordinate servant works to strengthen the power of his master and oppresses those inferior to him. The Indian bureaucracy, especially the ICS, was not simple. Called the "Steel Structure" of the British government. The first characteristic of this iron structure was that it would not waver in obeying orders, even at the cost of its nation. (Mukerjee, 1974) Akbar says,

باتیں ہرگز خلاف عزت نہ کرو
دم بھر بھی شرارت و بغاوت نہ کرو
(Ibid, n.d.) بدنام کرو نہ وضع انگریز کو
پتلون پہن کے ترک اطاعت نہ کرو

Bureaucracy is also soulless, and the smaller the servant, the more he can harass the masters and prevent them from doing their work. Akbar has made these points very clear.

باقی نہیں وہ رنگ گلستان ہند میں
محنت کا اب ہے کام گلستان ہند میں
کیوں گفتگو کسی کو ہو اس ٹھیک بات میں
شیخی زبان میں ہے حکومت ہے ہاتھ میں

The pain and anger hidden in the "Khalistan Hind" composition should be revealed to us even today; otherwise, listen to this poem.

جب غور کیا تو مجھ پہ یہ بات کھلی
(Asim, 1967) دقت میں تو وہ ہیں جو نہ صاحب نہ قلی

Akbar was probably the first Indian to realize that education, along with war and violence, was central to the expansion of imperial colonialism.

توپ کھسکی پروفیسر پہنچے
(Allahabadi, Kulliyat, 1997) جب بسولا بٹا تو رندا ہے

Bacula is an ax for cutting wood or stone, and Randa is a tool for peeling wood and removing its



unevenness. Remember Iqbal's poem,

میاں نجار بھی چھیلے گئے ساتھ
(Iqbal, Bang-e-Dara, 1962) نہایت تیز ہیں یورپ کے رندے

By Rail, he means that the government expands with the Western power. We have seen this before. How bureaucracy distorts human character, see some glimpses of it in these poems.

بہر خدا جناب یہ دیں ہم کو اطلاع
صاحب کا کیا جواب تھا بابو نے کیا کہا
تیغ زباں کی دیکھو ہر سو برہنگی ہے
بابو کے حوصلے ہیں صاحب کی دل لگی ہے
ضعف مشرق نے تو رکھا پاؤں کو چھکڑا وہی
مغربی فقروں نے لیکن مجھ کو انجن کر دیا
اچھے اچھے پھنس گئے ہیں نوکری کے جال میں
سچ یہ ہے افزونی تنخواہ جو چاہے کرے
میری نصیحتوں کو سن کر وہ شوخ بولا
(Akbar, 1988) نیٹو کی کیا سند ہے صاحب کہیں تو مانوں

When the British evicted the Marathas and took Shah Alam II under their "protection" in 1803, historians with a colonial mindset refer to the later period as English Peace, as thieves disappeared from the roads. The looting of Jats and Mewatis stopped, etc. It is possible that this English Peace included the blessing of the English administration, and likely that it may not. Still, the humiliation of Indians, especially the people of Delhi, was very much in it. Some people still remember the English rule that there was not so much peace during that time. How well has Akbar opened the reality of English Peace,

ممنون تو میں ہوں ترا اے سایہ شجر
سر پر مگر عذاب ہے چڑیوں کی بیٹ سے

The beat of the sparrows refers to the humiliation that comes to the subjugated nation every moment at the hands of the colonial ruler. (Akbar, 1988) Nowadays, it is customary to call globalization and the spread of capital a new colonial strategy of Western powers. The popularity of consumerism is also a tactic of capitalist powers. These things are true, but not in Akbar's time. Consumerism was not globalization, and he was not aware of Karl Marx's statement that the ultimate goal of capitalism is to turn the whole world into a market. Despite this, Akbar had seen these things,

یورپ میں گو ہے جنگ کی قوت بڑھی ہوئی
لیکن فزوں ہے اس سے تجارت بڑھی ہوئی
ممکن نہیں لگا سکیں وہ توپ ہر جگہ
دیکھو مگر پیٹرس کا ہے سوپ ہر جگہ



مجھے بھی دیجئے اخبار کا ورق کوئی
مگر وہ جس میں دواؤں کا اشتہار نہ ہو
چیز وہ ہے بنے جو یورپ میں
بات وہ ہے جو پائیر میں چھپے (Danish, 1996)

With consumerism and globalization, what is troubling modern man is environmental pollution. There was no such concept in Akbar's time. Although in 1851, when the people of England saw the sight of the railway engine for the first time, some people called it "the evil of hell," some criticized its noise and thunder, and some considered its smoke evil, within a few years, the pressure of the Industrial Revolution silenced the voices of protest. Akbar may not have known anything about the history of railways at that time, but Akbar saw both things here. An engine or a railway vehicle is not only a means of expansion of imperialist power but also a weapon for destroying the earth's environment.

تنہائی و طاعت کا یہ دور ہے اب دشمن
پیڑوں پہ نہ وہ طائر صحرا پہ نہ وہ جوین
جنگل کے جو تھے سائیں وہ ریل کے ہیں پائیں
املی کی جگہ سگنل قمری کی جگہ انجن
پھر اس شاہکار شعر (یا پیروڈی) سے آپ سب واقف ہی ہوں گے،
ابھی انجن گیا ہے اس طرف سے
کہے دیتی ہے تاریکی ہوا کی (Danish, 1996)

We are familiar with the new organization of cities. Big people or the wealthy class inhabit some areas of the city. There are also settlements of jhagi huts dwellers, who are usually kept at a distance. There was no such distinction and organization in the Mughal town and hence no sense of class distinction, which is a painful fact of life today. As usual, Akbar was the first to realize this division and the British gave the city division.

شیخ ہوں شہر میں اور کمپ میں سید ہوں یہ کیا
جس میں مل جل کے رہیں سب وہی بستی اچھی
کیمپ میں پاتا ہوں یاروں کو جو دن کو بیشتر
یہ اثر ہے اصطبل کا ورنہ خر کوئی نہیں (Allahabadi, Kulliyat, 1997)

Qamaruddin Ahmad Badayuni writes in "Bazm-e-Akbar" that one day Akbar said to him, "Look at the changes in the cities that the ruling class and nobles are in the civil line, dirty corners of the city for the poor to spend their days." are separate. What is meant by this is that the rich and the poor will not be together, nor will they sympathize with each other's pain and suffering.

It is nothing but injustice to think that Akbar was anti-progress, reactionary, and lacked awareness of the truth, and he was merely aware of the changing times to the limit that he was against it. The fact is that Akbar was not against the development of education and science, and industry. (Danish, 1996) He opposed these objects being used to perpetuate or symbolize colonialism. As we have seen above,



Akbar uses "cannon" here and there in a metaphorical, almost figurative sense. It is a symbol. After reciting a few poems and a piece, I leave. "Cannon" is also a metaphor in the poem, it is also a symbol, and for the sake of a subtle phrase, fire also springs up.

بس کدورت سے دل اس تیرہ دروں کا ہے بہرا
یہ تو بربادی اریاب دغا چاہتی ہے
لگی لیٹی نہ لگا رکھتی تھی تلوار کی جنگ
(Ibid, n.d.) توپ کیا چاہتی ہے صرف دغا چاہتی ہے

Above I have quoted a poem from "Gandhi Nama." Now I think some other poems should be presented from the same place. These poems fully prove that Akbar did not have a narrowness of conservatism; instead, he saw that if the Western colonial system were not stopped, it would turn into globalization. (Neale, 1962)

سواری ہے انہیں کی راہ ان کی اور ڈاک ان کی
انہیں کی فوج ہے ان کی پلس ہے اور تاک ان کی
ہوا میں ایرشپ ان کے سمندر میں جہاز ان کے
عمل ہم میں کیا کرتے ہیں نامعلوم راز ان کے
علوم ان کے زباں ان کی پریس ان کے لغات ان کے
(Allahabadi, Kulliyat, 1997) ہماری زندگی کے سارے اجزا پر ہیں ہاتھ ان کے

Just think, if this is not a picture of Globalization, what is it?



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