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Maulana Husain Azad's *Darbar-e Akbari*: Some Preliminary Cultural and Sociological Notes

IT IS PROBABLY CORRECT to say that, in a sense, history books can be counted as a part of the literary arts. This is especially true of history books written centuries ago in the East since they contain not just many samples of classical poetry—such as the ghazal (lyric), *qaṣīda* (ode), *marṣiya* (elegy) and *rubāʿī* (quatrains)—but also of descriptive and imaginary expressions of literary prose. Additionally, apart from their literary value, they are also an invaluable resource for studying other disciplines, such as psychology, ethnology, folklore and sociology—especially the last three, which concern traditions, customs, attitudes and ways of life, social affairs and folktales.

As almost everyone interested in Urdu literature knows, Maulānā Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād (1830–1910) is among the most prominent Urdu poets, writers and historians. He had a great influence on Urdu literature and it is impossible to deny his impact on Urdu historiography. Ram Babu Saksena, the famous historian of Urdu Literature, writes on Āzād's importance for Urdu:

As one of the fathers of the new movement, a pioneer of the new spirit that was dawning on Urdu literature, Mohammad Husain Azad ranks very high. He is one of the greatest of modern poets, a most distinguished writer of racy, piquant, delightful prose, a critic of considerable merit, a great educationist, a clever journalist, a remarkable and unimitable [*sic*] stylist and a great authority on modern Persian. His services to Urdu language are immense and valuable. To him the Urdu poetry owes the foundation of the new kind of poetry. He was in short a man of letters in the fullest sense of the word.

(1940, 219)

Darbār-e Akbarī (henceforward, *Darbār*), one of Āzād's important

works, contains the history of Akbar Shāh (1556–1605)—his life, era, system of governance and social situation in India.

There is no need here to give a detailed explanation of who Akbar Shāh was or what role he played in the history of India. But very briefly, according to some historians Akbar was one of the most successful Indian kings. We can see this, especially, in the writings of modern-day historians in the West. For example, this appreciation from William Dalrymple's book *The Last Mughal*:

This was particularly so of the Emperor Akbar. He issued an edict of *sulh-i kul*, or universal toleration, forbade the forcible conversion of prisoners to Islam and married a succession of Hindu wives. He also ended the *jizya* tax levied only on non-Muslims, and ordered the translation of the Sanskrit classics into Persian.

At the same time that most of Catholic Europe was given over to the Inquisition, and in Rome Giordano Bruno was being burnt for heresy at the stake in the Campo dei Fiori, in India the Mughal Emperor Akbar was holding multi-faith symposia in his palace and declaring that "no man should be interfered with on account of religion, and anyone is to be allowed to go over to a religion that pleases him." He promoted Hindus at all levels of the administration, entrusted his army to his former enemy, Raja Man Singh of Jaipur, and filled his court with artists and intellectuals, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

(2007, 5)

To others, especially to Hindus, he was an idol. As Indian critic and historian V. D. Mahajan wrote:

Akbar, the Great, was one of the greatest rulers of Indian history. He has become a hero whose memory is immortalized as a great king in the hearts of the people of India. The lapse of three hundred years has not diminished it in any way. It has been rightly stated that "he possessed that broad-minded sympathy, that capacity to trust and to evoke trust, that generous confidence in a loyal people, which enabled him to weld together a great and durable empire out of the poor fragments of military conquests left to him by his father.

(1961, 52)

As we will see, Mahajan's point of view echoes somewhat the very thoughts in the *Darbār*.

So, the *Darbār* is a very good resource about this renowned king and it deserves to be examined closely. I think that among Āzād's works it holds a special place, notwithstanding the fact that according to Muḥammad Ṣādiq (and others), "*Darbār-e Akbarī* is a clear proof of Āzād's Akbar-worship. From a stylistic point of view, this book—which consists of roughly

850 pages and includes information about people associated with Akbar's court—shows the mental decadence of its author" (1972, 326). Perhaps, to some extent, these criticisms can be justified, especially regarding Āzād's Akbar-worship, but alongside these aspects, the *Darbār* is a marvelous treasure trove in which there are valuable gems of the history, culture and civilization of India, and it is especially important for those who do research on the culture and civilization of the Turks who migrated from different parts of the Turkic world to India and settled there.

At the beginning of the *Darbār*, Āzād briefly gives some hint of the sort of information he will provide:

People will say that Āzād promised to write *Darbār-e Akbarī* but what he is writing is a *shāh-nāma*. Look, now I am going to record the kind of information which will provide a clear mirror of the religion, morality, customs, government laws and practices of the mentioned king, and also of the customs and traditions and trade of the era. God grant that it may give pleasure to my friends.

(1910, 35)¹

From this description, it becomes clear that we can derive many benefits from the *Darbār*, both about Akbar's period and his ancestors as well as the culture and customs associated with them. As a researcher on Turkish origins, I naturally begin my survey of the *Darbār* looking for points related to Turkish culture. One example is an event from the days before Akbar's birth:

While Akbar's mother was pregnant, one day she sat stitching. All of a sudden something occurred to her and she pricked her ankle with the needle and applied *surma* [antimony]. At that moment Humāyūn came in from outside and asked: "My dear wife! What are you doing?" She answered: "I hope my child will also have a similar floral pattern on his foot." Witness the power of God, when Akbar was born he had the same *surma* mark on his ankle.

(4)

A traditional belief, now supported in large part by modern medical research, is that whatever a mother eats and does to her own body during pregnancy will surely have an impact on the baby she is carrying inside her. This belief is also found in Turkey, where old women say that if a pregnant woman eats something, such as the fruit of some tree belonging to another without the owner's permission, her baby will have brown

¹All subsequent references to *Darbār-e Akbarī* are from the same 1910 edition. Translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

marks on its body. Elderly Turks do not even allow a pregnant woman to look at ugly things or people, out of fear that if this coincides with the first stirrings of the baby inside the womb, the baby might end up looking as ugly as the person the mother looked at.

This belief is found among Turkic tribes who may be living in different parts of the world. There are other similar shared beliefs. Explaining the word “*kūka*” in a footnote, Āzād writes that it was used for a boy whose mother had suckled a prince or nobleman’s son; such a boy was “called that prince’s or nobleman’s son’s ‘*kūka*’” (4n).

“*Kūka*” is a Chughtai Turkish word. It is derived from the Mongolian language and means “woman’s breast.” I think Āzād is mistaken here. Even today in Turkey it is generally believed that a woman who gives her milk to someone else’s baby is just like the birth-mother of that baby. She is respected like the child’s own mother and her children are thought of as that baby’s brothers and sisters. For this reason it is forbidden for them to marry one another as it would be considered immoral. In some families, including my own, women who consider marriage between the children of sisters and brothers undesirable will intentionally give their breast milk to each other’s babies, if they bear children at the same time, to make it impossible for the children to marry when they grow up. Since marriage between the children of brothers and sisters is not prohibited in Islam, this is a traditional way of preventing marriages between close cousins, nephews and nieces. Since we regard a woman who gives us her breast milk as our own mother, we call her “mother of milk” or “milk mother,” not “wet nurse” as in English.

Another interesting event recorded in the *Darbār* goes as follows:

His mother gave birth to several daughters one after another. In the Kabul area she became pregnant again. The father threatened the mother and said: “If you give birth to a daughter yet again, I shall surely leave you.” As the days of delivery drew near, the helpless lady came to Maryam Makānī. She told her about the situation and asked what she should do. “I shall abort the child. At least I won’t become homeless.” As she was leaving she saw Akbar playing along the way. Although he was only a little child, he asked: “Aunty, what’s the matter? You look despondent.” The heart of this unfortunate lady was so laden with sorrow that she told him as well. Akbar said, “If you care for me, don’t ever do that. Just watch, you will surely have a son! By the grace of God, Saif Khān was born. After him, Zain Khān was born. As she lay dying, she was murmuring, “Ajmērī, Ajmērī.” Perhaps she had Khvāja Ajmērī’s name in her heart or was calling [for] Akbar. [...]

The passage seems to suggest that Akbar had supernatural powers. It also makes it quite clear that in the East generally, and in the Islamic world in particular, parents at that time gave much more importance to sons than to daughters, as they do in some Islamic countries even today. Since they think of a son as the one who will continue the family line and provide them assistance in their old age, they prefer to have sons, and in some cases mothers may be forced to have an abortion if it is somehow established that they may be carrying a girl. It is difficult to imagine the prevalence of such traditions, reminiscent of the time before Islam (*‘aṣr-e jāhiliya*), among Muslims in contravention of Islamic teachings and in view of the great love the Prophet of Islam had for his daughter Fāṭima. After accepting Islam, the Turks came under the influence of the old Arab culture and changed their attitude toward daughters and wives. But prior to this influence, upper class Turkish women enjoyed the same status as their men in governing bodies and were involved in wars and even fought alongside men. Even in the rapidly changing Turkey of today, there is a proverb used by fathers who have sons: “A real man will have a brave son.” This proverb also gives some insight into the social status of women in Turkish society under the influence of the old Arab culture.

As mentioned before, there are many cultural and sociological factors that are common in the Eastern world which are comparable to Turkish culture. Āzād mentions many such elements that apply to the Turks. For instance, he writes commenting on the reception of the good news of Akbar’s birth:

It is a custom of the Turks that when someone brings good news of this kind, the messenger is rewarded. If the news is received by a member of the middle class, a member of the nobility, he will take off his robe and bestow it upon the messenger. If he is a rich man, then in keeping with his economic status, he will give a caftan and a horse. He will give whatever he is able to of money and goods. He will hold a banquet for everyone in celebration of the good news and make his servants happy with gifts and honors.

When the rider brought the happy news to Humāyūn, the latter looked around but could not find anything to give. At last he remembered that he had a musk-bag in his belt. He took it out, broke the musk into pieces and gave some of it to everyone so that the custom might be carried out.

(2)

Further on Azad writes:

It is a custom among Turks that when a child begins to walk, his father, grandfather or uncle, or whatever elder may be present, takes off his turban and hits the walking child. In this way, the child falls down and they

celebrate the event. When Akbar was one and a half years old he began to walk and Māhim [wife of Humāyūn] said to Mirzā ‘Askarī: “You are the only one here who can be counted as his father. If this custom is carried out the boy will not be deprived of elderly affection.”

(7–8)

There is more information, especially about the Naurūz (New Year) celebrations of the Turkic people. Āzād explains:

These kinds of customs continued during the time of Humāyūn since they belonged to Chengizi Turks. They celebrated “Naurooz” as an Eid [festival]. They would set out a table of foods open to all the people (*khvān-e yaghmā*) and they would loot and plunder. Even in Islam every monarch accepted it as an Eid to a greater or lesser extent, and when Akbar acceded to the throne he begun to celebrate this holiday as the Eid of the universe.

(71)

All this information about the Turks reflects the lifestyle of the Turks in India and also brings back memories of the Turks’ past customs and beliefs, which are partly forgotten today in Turkic communities. But none of this means that Āzād liked the Turks very much. In reality he displayed hostility and enmity toward them wherever he had the opportunity. This was perhaps partly because of his Akbar-worship, which influenced his thinking on some topics concerning Akbar. Although Akbar was the descendant of a Chughtai Turk family, it was the Turks who thwarted Akbar’s plans to change an administration dominated by Muslims into an interracial and interreligious society. Thus, Akbar’s enemies naturally became the enemies of Āzād and he did not hesitate to insult them. We see some of this in the pages of the *Darbār*:

[He] gave the horsemen to him as escorts and said: [Tardī Bēg] let loose his horsemen around the royal army that had just trampled his own forces and told them: “Keep advancing, meanwhile shouting that Hājī Khān Afghānī arrived from Alvar for Humāyūn’s help and drove out Tardī Bēg. But Hājī Khan is also coming back this way since he knows that Turks are deceitful and even as they flee they might turn around and return.

(15)

In another passage Āzād writes:

[...] He was also aware of what his father had to endure at the hands of his uncles. The descendents and loyalists of his uncles are still there. The Turkish horde that was with him at the time was like a double-edged sword. They turned whatever way they saw as to their advantage [...].

(62)

The Turks were not the only ones Āzād was angry with. Scholars of religion, judges of Islamic law, and theologians of Islam were also in the circle of his abhorrence since they too were obstacles to Akbar's aims, perhaps more so than the Turks. In the *Darbār* there are numerous places where Āzād expresses his negative opinion of these groups while demonstrating a positive attitude toward other communities, such as the Hindus and Parsis (Zoroastrians of India).

Since he was in India and he had to live and get along with Hindus, he followed and accepted many of their customs. You will remember surely! The Zoroastrian priests had planted in the mind of this illiterate monarch the thought that the country and society would change in the year 1000 and he would be their ruler. The excitement thereof made him so impatient for the things he was supposed to do in 1000, he carried them out before that.

(150)

And elsewhere:

He was well aware of the requirements implicit in his work. The qazis and muftis [judges and expounders of Muslim law] were ever ready to subject him to the Shari'at [Islamic Sacred Law]. In some cases because of their greed, sometimes because of their stupidity or ignorance, sometimes because of their carelessness, sometimes to display the authority of their fatwas, they disputed with the grandees [of Akbar's court] and managed to prevail. It was natural that this would irk and irritate the grandees. Then too, the court had become infested with ulema with amazing ingenuity. Flattery and greed for rewards made them come up with [novel] prescriptions that went even beyond the King's passion for reform, all of which further paved the way for newer reforms and governance.

(47)

Most of the *Darbār* contains information about Akbar's new approach towards the Hindus that changed the very nature of Muslim-Hindu relations forever and created a somewhat more unified, bilateral social fabric. According to some writers it was his obligation, and according to others it was his love of Hindus that compelled him to adopt this policy.

In his work on Akbar's religious policy, Makhan Lal Roy Choudhury describes Akbar's approach to the Hindus as follows:

Akbar had from the beginning a high respect for the Hindus. He was the first of the house of Timur to be born in Hindustan. His birth in a Hindu house while his father was flying away from India as a fugitive—when even his brothers were hostile, not to speak of other Muslims—had a very wholesome influence on his life. If the father could not have any opportunity of showing his gratitude to his benefactor's race, the son had. At the

beginning of his reign while he was placed between the crackers by Bairam and Maham Anaga, it was the help of Behari Mal that carried him through. His long and varied experience had proved to him that Hindu help was essential in the administration of the land of the Hindus. Nearly 50% of Akbar's army was manned by the Hindus and the revenue department was practically a monopoly of the Hindus; so he could not be blind to the sentiments, traditions and psychology of such a major section of the state.

(1952, 88)

Akbar did have some obligation to improve interactions with the Hindus, but this was not the only thing that played a role in his new approach. For some six hundred years the Ottoman sultans controlled vast territories from the Arabian Peninsula to Ukraine in the north and to Vienna (Austria) in the west. Like the Baburids, the Turks were in the minority and other nations and religious groups were more numerous. However, although the Ottoman sultans respected their subjects and had a balanced, measured policy towards them, they did not do the things Akbar did. They did not try to subdue the Islamic intelligentsia and the mullahs or create a new faith system. Nevertheless, they managed to survive much longer than the Baburids of India. Obligations and necessities could not have been the only factors influencing Akbar's adoption of a new policy towards his Hindu subjects, as some European scholars, and especially some Hindu writers of India such as Roy Choudhury, have suggested. In reality, Akbar was a unique individual. Perhaps a natural genius, perhaps a man having some mental problems. But he was a great king and he achieved his goals preparing a strong base for his own kingship and for his successors.

Āzād was well aware of the obligations of his beloved king and wrote about the same things as Roy Choudhury:

In ancient times every state had had a special personal connection with the Shari'at. In its inception the state would be established by the power of Shari'at, but with time the latter itself flourished under the shadow of the state. The atmosphere of this court, however, began to change. First, the foundations of the state became firmly established, indeed its power had begun to reach out to far and wide. Secondly, the king had come to realize that in their difference Turan and Iran were as far removed from Hindustan as the East from the West. There the monarch and the subject were united in one faith, so whatever ruling the religious scholars issued was incumbent upon everyone to follow, regardless of whether it went against or in favor of personal or state interests. India, on the other hand, was the homeland of Hindus. Their religion, customs, practices, and lifestyle were all different. Whatever happens during conquests is one thing, but if the

monarch aims to hold on to his conquest and wishes to remain in the country, he is obliged to reflect deeply before taking an action and never lose sight of the aims and objectives of the citizenry.

(46–47)

As we see above, Āzād wrote about the same things as Choudhury, but with a slight difference. Āzād thought that Akbar's new approach to Hindus was not only for his own interest but also that his affection toward them played a great role. According to Āzād this was the result of a bilateral affection:

[...] The people of India regarded the sight of the king at dawn very auspicious. The people who came to the river for ritual bathing appeared before him in their thousands—men, women, children—and prostrated to him and said: “May our great king live in peace and prosperity!” And they felt happy to do so. When he [Akbar] saw them he became even happier than when he saw his own children and this happiness was justified, for had not his own people (the Turks) banished his own grandfather (Babur) so unceremoniously from the latter's inherited domains, throwing overboard all consideration to the service rendered for half a dozen generations? And here were these strangers, a foreign race, that were treating him with such fond love! Who could be dearer than them! [...]

(63)

Akbar enjoyed this affection and gave ear to the voices and suggestions of his Hindu courtiers without any hesitation. He relied on them when he made decisions regarding life and death even if their suggestions derived from their own holy books. Āzād writes:

Among the prized horses there was one as swift as the wind. White from head to toe, the very image of light, like Buraq [the horse-like animal on which the Holy Prophet ascended to Heaven]. Akbar named it “Nūr-e Baiẓā” [Light of the Sun]. When Akbar mounted him, the horse sat down. Everybody began to look at each other since this was not a good omen. Rājā Bhagvān Dās (Mān Siṅgh's father) came forward and said: “Your Majesty, congratulations on victory!” Akbar said: “May you be well! Why?” He replied, “I've been witnessing three omens continually along the way:

“1) It is written in our Shastras that when the army is ready for action and the commander begins to mount but the horse sits down, then this means victory will be his.

“2) Your Majesty, please observe how the wind has changed its direction. Our elders have recoded that when such a situation obtains, victory is as good as secured.

“3) Throughout the way I've observed vultures, buzzards and ravens continually trailing our army. This too the elders have indicated as a sign of

success.”

(29)

As mentioned before, this was not social tolerance shown just toward Hindus, there were also other communities and religious groups, such as Parsis, Christians and Jews, who benefited from Akbar's policy. For instance, the Parsis were the first community that gained from this initiative. Āzād writes:

Fire-worshipping Parsis came from Nausārī, a region of Gujarat-Decan. They brought along the books of the religion of Zoroaster. The kind-hearted king met with them with great pleasure. He inquired from them about the customs and practices of the Kēyānī kings, the laws for honoring the fire, and about its terms. Mullā Šāhib says: He built an *ātish-kada* [fire-temple] by the palace. The order was that the fire should not be allowed to die down abruptly since it was among the signs of God's greatness and a light among his lights. In the twenty-fifth year of his succession to the throne, Akbar prostrated unhesitatingly before the fire. Whenever an oil lamp or a candle was shining, the companions and comrades of the king would stand up to show it respect.

(66)

The above passages amply support the view that Akbar endeavored hard to create a society drawn from the different elements of the Subcontinent—a beautiful mosaic, perhaps, which had all the colors of India. Āzād may have seen these qualities of Akbar and tried to convey them to his readers. But Akbar's beautiful mosaic ignored the Sunni Muslims of India. Perhaps to Akbar, their color was not as beautiful as the colors of the other communities. Akbar set down many regulations to create this Indian mosaic despite the forceful opposition of the Sunni Muslim intelligentsia and his Turkish brotherhood.

Muta' marriage was allowed and the chronogram of his seal was inscribed "*Allahu Akbar*" instead of "*Bismillāh ar-Raḥman ar-Raḥīm*" (with the potential implication that the former also meant "God is Akbar"). An order for the production of a commentary of the Qur'ān was issued, the translation of the *Atharva Veda* was commenced, the royal hunt was stopped, and the Friday khutba was read in Akbar's name (which was an open denial of the Caliph's power in India). Sheikh Tāju'd-Dīn introduced the practice of *sajda* (prostration) at the court, the shaving of beards was permitted by a fatwa of Hāji Ibrāhīm, the *Naurūz-e Jalālī* was celebrated, and the "*Dīn-e Ilāhī*" was promulgated. Wine selling was restricted, prostitutes were segregated, pigs and dogs were reared and the meat of pigs and tigers was allowed. The wearing of silk clothing and gold was allowed,

the *azān*, prayers, fasting, and pilgrimage were regulated, and some copies of the Qurʾān were destroyed in centers of rebellion. The reading of Arabic was discouraged among the masses and the curricula of education changed. Use of the names Aḥmad, Muḥammad and Muṣṭafā was stopped. Mosques were changed into stables in centers of rebellion. Dice playing and the taking of interest were allowed and the “Ilāhī Era” was introduced.²

In spite of all these regulations, most of which were contrary to Islamic Law and the interests of Muslims, to Āzād, Akbar remained absolutely blameless and blissfully free of any defect. For example, regarding the “prostration,” which in Islam is only due to Allah, Āzād thinks that Akbar was right and the objecting mullahs were in error.

[...] Ghāzī Khān Badakhshī said: *Sajda* is permissible before the king. The ulema bristled and raised a fuss, and the debate broadened and became jumbled. In their excitement, the objecting mullahs neither took a breath of peace themselves nor let anyone else take it. Advocates of the permissibility [of *sajda*] tried to reason with great gentleness with the mullahs and at the same time consolidated their own position. They said: Have a look at the era of the *salaf* [earliest generations of Islam], at the ancient nations. They put their foreheads on the ground before their elders out of humility and reverence. Why did the angels prostrate themselves before Adam? Of course, to honor him! And why did Joseph’s father and brothers prostrate before him? Of course it was offered to show him respect, not to worship him! Well, this is just such a *sajda*. Why then this denial? This squabbling?

(47)

All these regulations, including the one about “*sajda*,” were a great upheaval that shook the Muslim social structure to its very roots and changed their way of life.³ However the greatest shock was about to come.

²Regarding these regulations, see Choudhury (1952, 142–71). For some researchers, almost all of the information about Akbar’s negative regulations was derived from ‘Abdu’l-Qādir Badāyūnī’s (d. 1615) *Muntakhabu’l-Tavārikh*, which was written under the influence of some political disagreements, especially his rivalry with Abu’l-Faḥl (d. 1602), so some of Badāyūnī’s comments and information about Akbar should be taken with a grain of salt. All the same, Badāyūnī was an orthodox Sunni Muslim and worked as religious officer at Akbar’s palace. He observed Akbar closely and dared to write the things he did about a monarch such as Akbar, so perhaps his impressions may be viewed to have some justification. Also, supporting evidence for his arguments can be found in Abu’l-Faḥl’s *Akbar-nāma*.

³We can see some hints about Akbar’s desire to be “the Divine Power” in the *sajda* movement as explained by Roy Choudhury: “In this year, as Badauni says, Shaikh Tajuddin introduced Sijdah (Prostration) and called it *Zaminbos* (kissing the ground). Looking on the reverence due to a King as an absolute religious

It was "*Dīn-e Ilāhī-e Akbar-Shāhī*"!

Dīn-e Ilāhī was a synthetic religious doctrine of Akbar for which elements were taken primarily from Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Jainism and Zoroastrianism. Many books have been written about it and it has been widely discussed. Āzād has also written amply on the subject. However, within the scope of this paper, only one example will be cited to illustrate this doctrine.

During those days it was decided that whoever changed his/her faith and embraced Akbar's *Dīn-e Ilāhī* should also accept "*Ikhlāṣ-e Čahārgāna*" (four moral principles):

Tark-e Māl (Abandonment of wealth)
Tark-e Jān (Abandonment of life)
Tark-e Nāmūs (Abandonment of honor)
Tark-e Dīn (Abandonment of religion)

Whoever has all four (*ikhlāṣ*) is complete, otherwise he/she will be a quarter, a half, and so forth, and his *ikhlāṣ* also will be like that. Every sincere lover of Akbar became a *murīd* [disciple] of the shrine. Now their religion was *Dīn-e Ilāhī-e Akbar-Shāhī* [the divine faith of Akbar Shāh].

(73)

Apart from these accounts, devoted to Akbar's conduct as ruler, Āzād also offers some interesting information about Akbar and his ancestors' time and their elevated position. For:

[...] During this period, Humāyūn also arrived from Lahore. He demonstrated tremendous bravery and courage in battlefields and finally this battle too was decided in his favor. [To celebrate the victory,] Bairam Khān had a *kalla-minār* memorial built.

(9)

Āzād explains *kalla-minār* in his footnote as:

command, he called the face of the king as *Ka'ba-i Muradat* (Sanctum of desires) and *Qibla-i Hajat* (Goal of necessities).¹ Akbar has been much maligned for this Sijdah. [V.A.] Smith says that Akbar almost claimed divinity by demanding Sijdah which was due to God only. Blochmann suggests that 'starting from divine right theory of kingship, Akbar almost claimed divinity in the end.' Mulla Sheri wrote a satire,

'The king this year has laid claim
To be a prophet
After the lapse of a year, please God,
He will become God!'" (1952, 150)

It is an old custom of the kings of Asia that when they win a battle they dig a big hole at an elevated, visible location and fill it with the severed heads of the mutineers. Later they erect a tower-like structure over it as a monument to the victory and as a reminder for people to take heed. This [monument] is called *kalla-minār*.

(9n)

Even if we grant that this was done at the time of Humāyūn and that Akbar himself had nothing to do with *kalla-minār*, this was, at any rate, the environment in which Akbar grew up. The paragraph below also shows that Akbar was not as exalted a human being as Āzād thought:

Discussion began about what the natural, mother tongue of a human being was? Which faith did he follow when he came into this world? And what came out from his tongue in the beginning? In 988 CE, in order to research the matter, he [Akbar] ordered a wide building to be built outside the town. Approximately twenty babies were taken from their mothers as soon as they were born and brought to that place. The entire corps of workers—servants, nannies, nurses—whether male or female, all were recruited from the mute, so that human voice could not be heard at all. The balance of comforts and conveniences were amply provided. The facility went by the name of *Gaṅg Maḥal* [Silent Palace]. After some years His Majesty went there. Servants brought the children and left them with him. They were tiny children, who were walking around, playing and frisking, and talking too, but not a word of what they said could be understood. They were making strange sounds like animals. After all, they had grown up in the *Gaṅg Maḥal*. What could they become but mute?

(109)

This is the great Mughal Akbar of Āzād along with what some other historians of India and the West have to say about him. Although he did great things for India and was a successful king, he was also a despotic ruler. Āzād's *Darbār-e Akbarī* is a wonderful account of the era of Akbar Shāh, his palace and his methods of governance. Also as mentioned, it is a treasure for researchers and scholars interested in the social, socio-psychological and cultural history of India, Indians, Indian Muslims and Turks. □

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