

Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *Musāfirān-e Landan* (1869)

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) was one of the outstanding figures of nineteenth century Indian political, religious and cultural life. He devoted his formidable energies to persuading his fellow-Muslims that their destiny lay in loyalty to the British and in a maximum absorption of the values of Victorian civilization. Although his castigation of the Muslims for their backwardness in relation both to the British and other Europeans and to their Hindu fellow-countrymen won him many enemies, his reformist message also attracted many devoted adherents to his cause, one of whose major elements was an enthusiastic advocacy of the use and development of Urdu. The works of Sir Sayyid's disciples constitute a major part of the Urdu literature produced around the turn of the century (*UL*, pp. 99–103).

Sir Sayyid was himself a tireless writer of books, tracts and articles on all manner of subjects. Although no great stylist, he always wrote with vigour and enthusiasm: and these qualities shine through the often rough-hewn style of what now seems a rather old-fashioned Urdu.

The passage is taken from the beginning of the travel-diary (*safar-nāmā*) of his visit to London in 1869, sections of which were regularly sent back for serial publication in the journal of Sir Sayyid's Aligarh Scientific Society made, in characteristically forceful style.

The first paragraph deals with the impression made on Sir Sayyid during his journey by train from Allahabad to Bombay by the splendid arrangements instituted for the dispensing of water to thirsty passengers at stations en route through the charity of wealthy Hindus. A typically caustic contrast is then drawn with the situation in his home province, where even in the main junctions near Agra and Benares, let alone such minor stations as Aligarh or Hathras, no such admirable initiatives have been undertaken by the lazy and selfish locals.

A brief comment on the various groups of outsiders brought in to work on the railways leads to the interesting observations of the final paragraph, in which Sir Sayyid makes much of his ability to communicate in Urdu with all classes of the people he met during his journey, through present-day Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. He ends with a dig against the 'Allahabad Association' and their advocacy of some supposed ancient tongue, i.e. the Hindi to whose promotion at the expense of Urdu Sir Sayyid remained actively and fiercely opposed throughout his long political life.

The text is taken from the standard modern edition of Muhammad Ismail Panipati, *Musāfirān-e Landan* (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab, 1961), pp. 37–39.

The context is well described in the biography of Sir Sayyid by his close disciple Altaf Husain Hali (6), *Hayat-i-Javed*, trans. K.H. Qadiri and D.J. Matthews (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1979), especially pp. 99–121.

جب ہم بلگام کے اسٹیشن پر پہنچے تو ہم نے تین برہمنوں کو (جن میں سے ایک معزز معلوم ہوتا تھا اور پوشاک بھی معقول پہنے ہوئے تھا) دیکھا کہ لوگوں کو نہایت تمیز و صفائی سے پانی پلا رہے ہیں اور پانی بھی نہایت عمدہ صاف میٹھا بہت ٹھنڈا باسی ہے۔ وہ معزز برہمن پکارتا ہے کہ ریل والو! بہت ٹھنڈا میٹھا پانی ہے۔ پھینے والو! پانی پیو، بہت ٹھنڈا پانی ہے۔ برتن سبھی ان برہمنوں کے جن سے وہ پانی دیتے تھے نہایت اچھے اور صاف خوبصورت تھے۔ اگرچہ شاید یہ انتظام بالتحفیں ہندوؤں کے آرام کے واسطے ہو مگر وہ سب کو پانی دیتے تھے۔ اور تمام مسافروں کو نہایت آرام تھا۔

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یہ کیفیت دیکھ کر ہم متعجب ہوئے۔ جب تحقیق کیا تو معلوم ہوا کہ جیون رام جادو سیٹھ ساکن کامپٹی نے اس اسٹیشن پر دھرم کے لئے پو (سبیل) بٹھائی ہے اور پانی پلانے کا بندوبست کیا، تاکہ مسافروں کو اور بالتحفیں ہندوؤں کو تکلیف نہ ہو اور اسی سبب سے ایسا عمدہ سامان اور ایسا اچھا باسی ٹھنڈا پانی ہے۔ یہ بات مجھے نہایت پسند آئی اور دل میں بیٹھ گئی اور جب زیادہ تحقیق کیا تو معلوم ہوا کہ ہر اسٹیشن پر جو کسی قصبہ یا شہر کے متصل ہے کسی خاص مہاجن نے ورنہ اس شہر یا قصبہ کے دوکان داروں نے آپس میں چندہ کر کے پو بٹھا رکھی ہے، اور پانی پلانے کا بندوبست کر رکھا ہے۔ چنانچہ ہر ایک اسٹیشن پر ہم کو چندے کی بٹھائی ہوئی پوملی، آلا ویسی خوبی اور خوش اسلوبی اور پانی کی احتیاط دوسری جگہ نہ تھی۔

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اس وقت مجھے اپنے ملک پر افسوس آیا۔ کیا ہمارے عزیز شہر علی گڑھ اور ہاتھرس کے لوگ ایسے نہیں ہیں جو اپنے شہر کے اسٹیشنوں پر ایسا عمدہ بندوبست کریں؟ اور کیا آگرہ کے متول ٹونڈل کے اسٹیشن پر اور بنارس کے دولت مند مغل سرائے کے اسٹیشن پر ایسا بندوبست نہیں کر سکتے؟ افسوس ہے کہ وہ لوگ صرف اپنا ہی برف کا پانی پی لینا دنیا کی تمام نعمت سمجھتے ہیں۔ زندگی اور مال و دولت اپنے آرام کو نہیں ہے بلکہ اوروں کو آرام پہنچانے کے لئے ہے۔

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اس طرف کی ریل پر پارسی اور ناگر اور دکھنی لوگ ایسی کثرت سے نوکر ہیں جیسے کہ ہماری طرف بنگالی ہیں اور یہی حال تمام سرکاری دفتروں کا ہے۔

بندہ نے الہ آباد سے بمبئی تک کیا گاؤں میں اور کیا چوکیات میں اور کیا ریل پر اور کیا گورنمنٹ کے اہل کاروں اور ہر ایک محکمے کے چپراسیوں اور ہر ایک جگہ کے قلیوں سے اردو میں گفتگو کی۔ سب لوگ ہر جگہ بخوبی سمجھتے تھے اور اردو ہی میں جواب دیتے تھے۔ بعض بعض لفظوں کے مکرر سمجھانے کی اور زیادہ تر آسان طور پر بیان کرنے کی ضرورت پڑتی تھی۔ کچھ شبہ نہیں کہ تمام ہندوستان میں اردو زبان اسی طرح سمجھی اور بولی جاتی ہے جیسے تمام یورپ میں فرینچ بلکہ اس سے بھی زیادہ مروج ہے، مگر میں نے ہر چند تلاش کیا وہ قدیم بھاشا جن کا رواج الہ آباد ایسی ایشن چاہتی ہے کہاں ہے، لیکن وہ مجھ کو کہیں نہیں ملی۔

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The editor has modernized Sir Sayyid's original spelling, hence the differences from the nearly contemporary preceding passage (3).

1 *bulgām*: presumably Pulgaon, a town near Bombay. The U script is not always very helpful in determining the pronunciation of unfamiliar names.

2–3 *nihāyat*: both as an adj. 'extreme' and as an adv. 'extremely', this A loan is one of Sir Sayyid's favourite words, occurring several times on almost every page of his forceful prose.

3 *sāf*: here used as an adv. 'absolutely, very', similar in sense to *nihāyat*.

3 *ṭhandā bāsī*: 'cool-smelling', a rather unusually-formed compound adj., cf. 11 *acchā basī* 'sweet-smelling'.

4 *rel vālo*: 'you train-passengers!', like *pine vālo* a vocative p.

5 *bartan bhī un brahmanōn ke*: 'and the pots as well of those Brahmans', illustrating both the common use of *bhī* as a sentence-linker (542b), and the way in which Sir Sayyid's hurried style often slips into the free word-order more characteristic of HU speech than formal writing.

6 *bit-taxsīs*: an A prepn. phrase (742).

8 *jīvan rām jādavā seth*: Jivan Ram is the personal name, Jadava (= Yadav) is a caste-name, and Seth the title commonly given to bankers or merchants.

9 *sākin-e kāmpaṭī*: 'resident of Kampati' (a town near Nagpur). This izafat phrase (841) is a typical fragment of U officialese, which is characterized by an abundance of such Persianisms. The style came naturally to Sir Sayyid, as a former district official, and colours much of his prose.

9 *pau (sabil)*: the glossing of a typically Hindu word, implying a drinking-stand which must be operated by Brahmans to avoid pollution, by an A term suggesting a drinking-stand established for thirsty Muslims is striking testimony to the basic cultural divide which underlies the linguistic divide between H and U.

11 *dīl meh baiṭh gāi*: 'deeply impressed itself upon me'.

12 *xās*: here 'leading'.

13 *biṭhā rakhī hai*: here *rakhnā* is used as a modal verb, cf. 14 *bandobast kar rakhā hai*, implying the sense of effective establishment, not simply that of physical placement.

14 *illā*: 'otherwise', an obsolete use of A *illā*, best known for its inclusion in the formula *ilāha illa-llāh* 'there is no god but God'. The modern U equivalent cj. is P *varnā* 'otherwise'.

16 *apne mulk par*: i.e. Sir Sayyid's home-province (called the North-Western Provinces and Oudh until 1902, when it was re-named the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, until re-titled Uttar Pradesh in 1947), as opposed to the 'foreign' parts made accessible to him by the newly constructed railways.

18 Rail-travellers have to change at Tundla Junction for Agra, at Moghul-sarai Junction for Benares. Sir Sayyid was obviously as impressed as modern enthusiasts by the splendours of nineteenth century Indian railway architecture.

21 *is taraf*: 'down here', i.e. where he has been travelling. The elite groups referred to are the Parsis, who are Gujarati-speaking Zoroastrians, and the Nagar Brahmans, another Gujarati-speaking community, while *dakhnī* 'Southerner' is a collective term perhaps indicating the way in which North Indians tend to lump all South Indians together.

22 *bangālī*: the westward spread of Bengali-speaking officials during the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century was an important factor in the contemporary cultural evolution of North India.

23 *bande ne*: the self-deprecating use of P *bandā* 'slave' instead of the 1st person pronoun is one of those standard features of polite P usage which were transferred to U.

23 *ilāh-ābād*: the standard U spelling of Allahabad.

23 *kyā... , aur kyā... , aur kyā...*: 'whether in... , or whether in... , or whether in... ', a simple rhetorical device very characteristic of Sir Sayyid's hectoring manner.

23 *caukiyāt*: the addition of the A p. suf. *-āt* to a native HU word is characteristic of U officialese (733). Although modern usage tends to employ the term *cauki* to designate a toll-post for the collection of local taxes, it here perhaps has the wider sense of an official post or station of any kind.

24 *mahkame ke caprāsiyoh*: 'peons of a law-court'.

25 *ba-xūbī*: a P prepn. phrase (843).

27 *faranc*: an accurate perception of the international role of French in nineteenth century Europe, but one unlikely to have occurred to many of Sir Sayyid's contemporaries in the parochial H and U worlds of North India.

28 *har-cand talāš kiyā*: 'however much I tried to find out', with a following *ki* being understood.

28 *ilāh-ābād aisosī-ešan*: the barbed reference is apparently to the Allahabad Committee formed a few years earlier under the secretaryship of Babu Saroda Prashad Sandial to act as a pressure-group demanding the replacement of U by H as the official language of the N.W.P.