AKHTAR-UL-IMAN (1915 - )

Born: Uttar Pradesh, India
Mother tongue: Urdu
University: Aligarh University, M. A.

Brought up in an orphanage, Akhtar-ul-Iman took some time to find his metier. In his late forties, however, he started writing for films in Bombay, and has become a most successful writer in the Indian film industry, winning numerous important awards. He has also directed one film. For his poetry he has been awarded the Indian Academy of Letters award.

Despite his success in the film world, Akhtar-ul-Iman has never written songs for films, preferring to keep his film writing and poetry separate worlds. Six collections of his verse have appeared between 1941 and 1977.
THE MOSQUE

Far away, beside a banyan, quiet and forlorn,
Where past and future, like devout transgressors
Softly mourn their sins wrapped in night’s dark shroud,
The broken spire of the desolate mosque
Still gazes at the flowing stream,
While from crumbling walls
The chandool* hymns the glory that is gone.

Every day the passing breeze
Sifts new dust over ancient grimy lamps
And the sun, panting as it sinks to death,
Blows out the shards of light on broken windows.

*An Indian bird renowned for its sweet song
All that ever went wrong, by night and day,
Sits now by the dome,
Listening to those lifeless prayers,
Never answered, never heard,
And seeks some formula of comfort.

A passing swallow, before winter comes,
Selects it for a refuge,
And all alone under the broken arch
For hours tells its stories of cold oppressive lands.

An old donkey, journeying to nowhere,
Dozes off for a while beneath a wall;
Or a traveller stops for a moment,
Then scurries off, a prey to nameless fears.

No broom sweeps that dusty floor.
Not even dew mists those empty water basins.
The niches hold the wept-out ghosts of candles.
There is no carpet, pulpit, imam or muezzin.

حمریناَم و همایش که گنبد که قریب ان پرده‌شان تراوی کردن که تاراکی‌های یک جزی ست، بی رنگی، زرمالی اثری که خاطر اور گویا، ول ست ئیام ناپذیری!

یا ابوبکر کوئی آر مر اک قرب، ایس کسی که لیه دو و نه نواکرده، سپه اور هر بی‌سکتبه تین سرمک گر یکبلون داستان سنجد مالک کی بی کردنی، سپه،

ایک چنگاَدل بر سر دو سوار تکان گذاری سے میس کی چو، او گریسیا یکا دزن میان چپک کی جا تا با، پایاسارکی کوئی آنی آتا، و ہو جو دی چرک ایک کی کھوپت یا سپه، آئے آئے!

فوزن جاروی کی یک چہرہ کی پھیلی، بی شہری،
وا قبضه پہلی جمہوری بن سبی کی بی حمایت
طان پر شیش کی کلورین نورنک اور
اب محسوب یہ دهمب، د مورن ن امام!
Heaven has already sent its messages:
Plain and mountain are both deaf to Gabriel’s call.
Perhaps there will not be another ka’ba
The barren wilderness stifles the voice of Abraham.

With a blank smile the cold moon floats above.
Stars spread their bright bleached sheet
Over the dead image of God’s heart.
Only the dew wets those lifeless eyes.

Each day a dirty, wretched, solitary lamp
Says to a pair of trembling hands:
You light me up each day, but never put me out.
One is lit; another extinguished.

Every ripple of the rapid sream, nurse of fierce storms,
Shouts from afar: You are but mortal.
Tomorrow bursting from these ancient channels
I will float you away,
Then the spire will be water,
The dome will be water,
Water, water.
CONFIDENCE

The arrogant wind said,
'You are only a particle, I'll blow you away';
A wave surged forward and said,
'You are just a straw, I'll float you away';
A flame of the fierce fire said,
'I'll burn you away';
And the land said,'I'll swallow you up'.
I tore the veil from my face,
Laughed, and said,'I am Solomon.
'Son of Adam; I am a man'.
CREATION

I'm sure I could create a world!
A few hamlets, a heart-broken few,
A sun and a moon, and a few shining stars,
Supports forever wavering, and hopes that are never fulfilled.

Let lights be swallowed up in darkness,
Let life forever cry itself to sleep,
And let this tale unfold through all eternity.

Let helplessness be the way of life,
Let death's anguish be the light relief,
And let the desert sand turn red with blood.

Let plagues come down from heaven,
Let prayers rise up, quiet and sad,
And let me stay merciless forever,
I know I could create a world.
THE BOY

On the hills near villages in the east,
Sometimes in mango orchards, sometimes on dykes,
Sometimes in the lanes, sometimes in the lakes,
Sometimes amongst the merriment of youngsters half-clad,
At dawning, dusk, in darkness of the night,
Sometimes at fairs, among the pantomime players,
Or lost on quiet bypaths chasing butterflies,
Or sneaking towards the hidden nests of little birds,
Barefoot, no matter what the weather,
Out of school, in deserted abodes,
Sometimes laughing in a group of pretty girls,
Sometimes restless like a whirlwind,
In dreams, floating in the air, flying like a cloud,
Swinging in the trees like the little birds,
I see a boy, wandering, carefree, independent,
As the flowing water of mountain streams.
This nuisance acts like my shadow,
Following my every step, pursuing me no matter where I go,
As if I were an escaped convict.
And he asks me: Are you really Akhtar-ul-Iman?

I acknowledge the blessings of almighty God;
I admit that He laid down this earth
Like a vast bed of velvet and brocade;
I admit that the tent of skies is His benison;
He ordered moon and sun and stars in space;
He brought forth rivers by splitting mountains;
He created me from dust, and gave me dominion over the earth;
Filled oceans with pearls, and mines with rubies;
Filled the air with bewitching bouquets;
He is the Master, Mighty, Singular, Wise;
He separates darkness from light,
If I know myself, it is his benevolence.
He has given splendour to the greedy, and adversity to me;
Made idiots wealthy, and a beggar out of me,
But whenever I stretch out my hands to beg,
This boy asks: Are you really Akhtar-ul-Iman?

My livelihood lies in the hands of others.
All I still control is my mind, that understands
That I have to carry the burden the rest of my life,
Till my elements are dispersed, and my pulse stops beating,
That subsisting means forever singing
Melody of dawn, or lament of night.
In front of the victors,
I cannot even call my song my own:
I have to smile when they say I am singing their song, not mine
That my pen's creations, the work of my restless nights,
Have to be passed like a counterfeit coin.
When I think about myself, in sorrow I say
That I am like a blister, bound to break one day.
In short, I wander like the morning breeze,
Longing for the morn when I seek help from the night.
And the boy asks: Are you really Akhtar-ul-Iman?
When he does so, in a fury I reply:
That depressed, neurotic soul
You keep enquiring for is long dead.
I have wrapped him in the shroud of self deception,
And thrown him in the grave of his hopes.
I tell that boy the flame is quenched
That was bent on burning all the trash of the world.
The boy smiles, and says softly:
That's a lie, a fib, a cheat.
Look! I am alive.
نگرکردن کے نام

金牌

غیر ملکہ چنگے گروپیان ہے خاص برخی کی بھی میں
اس کے دانے ایک ایک ہوئے بول اسے
داستنیت ہونا سروئی میں کا کا
داستنی اپنی کی متن میں بول اسے
تھاپتے ہوتے ہیں جب ہم راول ان گروپیان کو
نچھاپانے کے جدہ زخم زکزا بول اسے
اس سے بنا ہو اس کے لیے لیکن
ای میری جان حالیاً ہیریے میں ہے دین
ئے ہوئے پورے پورے قبضہ کو حلال
ستنتے ہوئے بھی میرے بھی کہ سے
پورے بھی ہریے ہے جب ہم راول ان
کے کی گروپیان کے علاوہ کیا ہے بن
جاانہاں جب کہ کانسی سے کھا کے ہو
سیاسی کیا جا اپنے ہے ان دو ہے
اوررہے کے تناوار میں تین جہاں بول
نکا ہو ہوں ہیں پرچاپا پر سے ہب
I go home too.
Don’t be so hard to find.
My wealth is still nothing but dreams.
I kept postponing our encounter till tomorrow,
Forever getting ready for the big day.
Now when I add up the burnt-out nights
That I have left behind in the haze of the past,
All I can see in the deal is loss.
If I had hoarded water drops, I’d have an ocean.
If I had gathered dust motes, I’d have a mountain.
Heedless, improvident, all I’ve piled over the years
Is one fat deficit.
Not only have I never known you, I’ve yet to see you up close.
My darling, my love,
Don’t flee from me.
My wealth is still nothing but dreams.
DAUGHTER OF TIME

The warmth and sweetness of your speech
Needs a better name than love:
The assault of light on darkness,
Christ coming to the land of suffering,
The caravans of fragrance spreading out on every side,
The peel of morning echoing in the vault of dawn.
In this haze, this fog-like darkness,
In this gloom, in this grey mist,
I can see nothing except you.
Life is our name for memories, sweet and sad.
Has anyone caught a colour, trapped a fragrance,
Snared a breeze, held on to twilight?
Each moment flees us like an enemy.
You will not meet me, nor I you.
We are only moments,
Moments that never return.
RETURN – A MONTAGE

Butterflies dance.
They go from one flower to another,
As if there’s a secret to whisper in each one’s ear.
To make them blossom into laughter.

The sun is not too hot.
Every passing breeze feels
Like an elderly sweetheart’s loving hand
Shaking my shoulder
As I sit dozing.

Women sit over their spinning wheels.
Some are cording cotton,
Others are busy sewing
As if this is all there is to life:
They joke with one another.
One says: My mother-in-law tut-tutted when my bangles rang.
I could do without moonlit nights, says another.
Another, laughing, talks about last night.
One topic leads to another.
One says: Love-making is a nuisance.
I play sick, says another.
In this glasshouse I enter too,
Hiding their smiles, they protest: make him go away.

A bird sings on the branch of a tree somewhere.
Another flies, singing, from earth towards the sky,
Like a ball hurled upwards.
One hops on a branch
As if dancing for joy at spring.
The gondni* bows down its golden fingers
Like a bashful maiden
Whose hands were yellowed** yesterday.

* An Indian tree with yellow fruits
** Refers to the custom of applying yellow dye to the hands of a bride
Cuckoos coo,
Jamans* are ripe, the mangoes bloom;
The harp of unity sounds sweet.
In swings, hung from the neem** trees,
Girls hymn the spring in chorus,
And the village resounds with their songs.

I go from swing to swing.
There's only one face missing.
Plucking up my courage, I ask someone,
Why hasn't Habeeba*** come yet?

The girls burst out in laughter.
He's still dreaming, one says.
Not dreaming, he's just come from the city
Another chimes in.
One thing thing leads to another.
The marriage was very elaborate, says Chameli.
A band and every thing, says Deepa.
You wouldn't believe what was spent upon the bride.

* An Indian fruit
** An Indian tree
***Name of a girl, literally meaning beloved
They keep chattering away, but all I ask is:
Does that stream still flow
Which gives the village life?
Of course, says Chameli.
And that banyan on its bank? still there!
When Haeeba used to leave me waiting,
I used to go to the stream and wash my face
And doze off in the thick shade of that banyan

Seasons come and go.
Crops ripen and are harvested.
And no one cries on that occasion.
If we don’t link molten steel ring by ring
There will be no chain,
And the cycle of life would end right here.

Look! there’s a crowd of youngsters in the lane.
One throws a ball and hits me.
I catch him and his face seems familiar.
Whose boy is he, I ask someone.
He is Habeeba’s son, says butcher Ramzani.
I couldn’t help laughing at his innocent face.
He laughed too, we both laughed,
And kept laughing for a long, long time.

Butterflies dance.
They go from one flower to another,
As if there’s a secret to whisper in each one’s ear
To make them blossom into laughter.
THE GRAVE

This is the story of a distant land.
In the stream of time,
With its whirlpool that spins everything away,
There lived a rich man
Who got caught in the whirlpool.
They tried everything:
The newest drugs, the latest techniques,
And doctors called from far and wide
Pocketed huge fees.
But the will of God prevailed,
And his son saw time spin that rich man down to death.
The news spread like wildfire.
Every one who heard it, cried, lamented.
The wailings of the son touched every heart.
There he stood tearing his hair, moaning,
'You are leaving us, father, going to a place
That holds no friend, not one companion,
Where you will have to live alone
In a dark hole,
No food, no light,
Forced to bear all those hardships alone.
Comfortless, you will find no one to help you.'
To that funeral in that distant land
In the stream of time,
There came a poor man.
He brought along his little son,
Who wide-eyed heard those grave laments
And said, 'Father, are they taking him to our house?'
THE MAN WHO LOVED MISERY

You think I am a simple soul, devoid of feelings.
In fact, I am an ocean.
Under my quiet surface I foster storms,
I am still water, but full of whirlpools.
I camouflage my pain with smiles,
I wrap myself in courtesy,
Lest men call me an animal.

That wealth of heritage
Man’s toiled for years to build
That we call ‘culture’,
I’d hate to knock down at a single blow.
Yet when I gaze at you,
My body fills with fire.
You know that in this world for me
Time takes its meaning all from you.
You know why I love the turn of night and day,
You know why my eyes smile at the very sight of you.
In this world I used to live
As in a city of the dead, no men,
But only corpses in their shrouds.
You made me feel that I was not a corpse.
You blessed me with the warmth of words,
You made the frozen blood flow through my veins again.
You dragged me out of a world of loneliness.
But I am not the poor young woodcutter,
Nor you the gentle princess of a story.
So why did you subject me to conventional torture?
You began adoring me, then pulled yourself away
As if I really am a walking corpse,
So when I see you now, that’s what I pray:
For God’s sake, let me be a corpse!
This indifference, this new ‘fidelity’
Breaks like brittle glass,
And you, heedless of all fear,
Weeping, embrace me, and shatter into pity.
REMEDI

Let's throw this rock-like thing into the sea.
Throw all the ocean's pearls in the vastness of the desert,
Dump all the desert's sands upon the city,
And wipe all fears of tomorrow from our hearts.
Let each man plant his own flag here,
So that if we ever do return
To find the living sand has devoured the city,
We'll see our flags still fluttering in the wind.
And under them we'll raise the tombstones of our forebears.
IN SEARCH OF A POEM

The sense of loss nags, like a splinter under my nail:
What I took from life as a benediction, was an alms,
Lest we poor cast the evil eye upon it,
Lest it be blamed.

All my prosperous days are fat cows, spikes of wheat.
I have locked them in a warehouse,
But now, sitting on its threshold, I wring my hands in sorrow.
Like a hoarder with a conscience, I am not serene.
All worldly goods are futile.

Comforts of life make me restless.
Thought, that was a whiff of fugitive musk fragrance,
Imagination, that was a wandering cloud, floating freely by,
I left all that God knows where in the race for social superiority.
This, and many such anxious reproaches
Often hound me so that
I set out in pursuit of the musk fragrance,
Of the wandering cloud.
Just stray about without direction.
I go into crowded slums, foul with bus fumes.
Whenever I see the perpetual ant-like army
Massed on the train platform,
I join up.
In temples, shacks, hospitals, whorehouses,
I search for the musk fragrance, the wandering cloud.
But I find nothing, only luckless men,
Who, like me, are baffled by all this absurd running about,
Who, like me, are helpless captives of night and day.
We feed on each other; we poison each other.
I lift my hands to pray for all of us.
I soothe each pain of my soul
By calling it a different name.
I sing praises of God
And set sail without a compass,
In search of that poem yet to be born.
ANCIENT RELICS

Pottery, coins, seals, broken statues to nameless gods,
Millstones, hearths hidden under heaps of earth;
Blunt tools which would have been used to dig;
A few weapons,
That might have been launched against dangerous beasts:
Is this all? My total heritage?
When men has advanced beyond that point, does he die?

Dust stirred by mounted soldiery has long since settled.
Poets and historians, who bore the flag of culture,
Lie sleeping in their graves.
There is no need for silk and other luxuries for ladies.
Merchants no longer carry such products from their lands.
They trade in lethal man-destroying weapons.
Even the aircraft, fast as lightning, has not helped,
Delhi's market now lies much farther from Lahore's.
The path of love lies empty, desolation on every hand.


een, ke, sambhar, idhaam dhar an keh te roh, roh te
mathe jhaal deci jhaal deh, bar
kan adhar dharan mel se dhar dharan jash
koi dharat rahe diatched aakarta karta
bole gare mbhak jhata
kia Jas anna yi durgi keh jhaal,
anas jhalaan se bhe akeh bhisheh kih mara saheh?
The coffins of tyrant kings have all crumbled into dust,
But their souls have taken on new bodies.
In every street roam thugs with torches.
Factories of deadly gases and weapons,
Like the eyes of a sad lover,
Never sleep.
Golden lads and lasses have all turned lechers
The private parts of ladies are common privies.
We have to live till we die, keep drinking down the poison.
Let’s be frivolous
And hold the court of dogs, head the cavalcade of vultures.