

*Kingdom, Household and Body
History, Gender and Imperial Service
under Akbar*

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I. Introduction

The history of composite religious cultures in India has over recent decades attracted much more consistent attention than the history of syncretic political and intellectual cultures. During the 1970s and 1980s, when the study of pre-colonial India drew greater numbers of scholars than has been the case more recently, a number of historians of the Mughal north concerned themselves with the means by which Akbar and his political allies were able to draw into imperial service a very disparate range of ethnic groups—Irani, Turani, Afghan, Rajput, Indian Muslim, high-caste Hindu scribalists—and to generate for them a new corporate and inclusivist ideology of service to emperor and state.¹ John Richards has described how a powerful dynastic ideology, formulated by Akbar's close friend and servant Abu'l Fazl in his monumental history of the empire the *Akbar-Nāma*, and given dramatic public expression in the ceremonial of the imperial court, glorified Akbar as the living embodiment of the Empire itself, and focus for the direct personal devotion of the imperial nobility.² Stephen Blake has

I am very grateful to Muzaffar Alam, Chris Bayly, Sunil Kumar, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and David Washbrook for their constructive criticisms of this paper. All errors are, of course, my own.

¹ There is a very large literature on the construction of Mughal imperial power. For an overview, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Mughal State 1526–1750*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1998. See also Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006.

² John Richards, 'The formulation of imperial authority under Akbar and Jahangir' in John F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, Madison 1978; 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers' in Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, University of California Press 1984.

drawn out the importance of patrimonial themes in the techniques which Akbar and his successors devised to maintain the sense of a personal familial bond between the emperor and his servants.³ Historians of Mughal administration such as M. Athar Ali have explored the ways in which the systematisation of *mansab* grants and appointments to offices under Akbar provided a common framework within which imperial servants from different backgrounds could seek advancement.⁴ With a different emphasis again, Mughal art historians have drawn attention to Akbar's intense interest in the power of images as a means of communicating new understandings of the nature of kingship and its place in the natural and social worlds, particularly through the dazzling illustrations for the *Akbar-Nāma* produced in Akbar's imperial atelier.⁵ S.A.A. Rizvi and Peter Hardy have focussed on the role of Abu'l Fazl in helping to project, through the massive illuminated history of his *Akbar-Nāma*, a new and more inclusive style of rulership for Akbar, which drew on sufi and medieval *ishrāqī* theories of the divine illumination of kingship.⁶ This presented Akbar as *insān-i kāmīl*, 'the perfect man', whose inner virtues of justice, self-control and renunciation of worldly attachments enabled him to attain the divine blessing of *sulh-i kull*, an attitude of universal concord and toleration.⁷

Much more recently, and in something of a revival of interest in the longer term history of composite intellectual cultures in India, Muzaffar Alam and Christopher Bayly have noted the important role of Greek and Persian influenced ethical digests in early modern north India. These offered a source of norms and values particularly appropriate to a political culture where the need was to build harmony and cohesion within a very diverse body of imperial servants.⁸ Such

³ See Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India 1639–1739*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991, and 'The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals' in Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1995.

⁴ M. Athar Ali, *The Apparatus of Empire: Awards of Ranks, Offices and Titles to the Mughal Nobility 1574–1658*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1985.

⁵ Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry, *Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory*, New York 1985, and Milo Cleveland Beach, *The Imperial Image. Paintings for the Mughal Court*, Freer Gallery of Art: Washington, DC, 1981.

⁶ S.A.A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal 1975; Peter Hardy, 'Abul Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah', in Christian Troll (ed.), *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries*. vol ii: *Religion and Religious Education*, Delhi 1985.

⁷ Abu'l Fazl, *Akbar-Nāma*, edited by Agha Ahmad Ali and Abdur Rahim, Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1873–1887.

⁸ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam. India 1200–1800*, Hurst and Company, London 2004. For the longer term significance of *akhlāqī* thought on Indian

ethical digests offered practical and moral advice on acquiring virtue and avoiding vice, based on a complex understanding of what was innate disposition or *akhlāq*, what could be acquired through the practice of virtue, and the role in this process of self-development of the faculty of reflection and judgement. Central to their vision was the harmonising figure of a philosopher-king, whose virtuous government would help bind together all the different classes of subjects in their quest for wisdom.⁹ As Bayly has suggested, these ethical treatises understood the science of good government to be an embodied rather than an abstract science. In keeping with much wider trends in ethical and philosophical thought in the medieval Indo-Muslim world, they presented the individual, the household and the kingdom as microcosms of each other in a universe of similitudes, each realm being similarly composed of constituent members, each with its own nature, wherein the noblest elements ruled over and regulated the others, and each realm depended for its well being on the proper balance between members so established. Humoural theories of bodily health extended to the wellbeing of the kingdom and the role of the king as its chief physician, whose task was to bring about equilibrium and harmony between its constituent members, each according to their natures. These natures corresponded to each of the four elements. Warriors were fiery by nature, scholars phlegmatic and watery; merchants were like air, in that they were essential to the maintenance of daily life, and peasants corresponded to the earth. Evil followed when one or other of these humours grew to dominate the others such as to destroy the equilibrium of the body politic, and the real mark of kingship lay in the ability to recognise and treat this sickness. In their Persian language form, these digests, and the internal dialogues with aspects of medieval Islamic thought that they contained, came to figure largely in the lists of reading recommended to imperial servants at the Mughal court. The *Akhlāq-i Nāsiri* of Nasir ud-din Tūsī (1201–1274) was the earliest and best known of the Persian works, and generated a large number of later versions and recensions.¹⁰

political ethics, see C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1998, 13–17.

⁹ For the history of *akhlāqī* literature, see J.H. Kramers et al (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden 1954, vol. i, 325–9.

¹⁰ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 46–80. For these themes in Tūsī's work, see 228–30.

These approaches have offered a range of insights into the composite qualities of Mughal political culture. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the perspectives of gender and the body may also have much to offer in this field. Contemporary histories are replete with information about the sexual disciplining of imperial servants, regulations concerning marriage, norms for male bodily comportment and ceremonial purification and conflicts over the acceptability of homosexual love. This is particularly the case in the work of the Mughal philosopher-historian Abu'l Fazl, whose writing has dominated successive generations of Mughal historiography, a remarkable testimony to the skill of its author in projecting imperial images as imperial realities.¹¹ These references, which have often been seen as incidental to the 'serious' political history of these contemporary accounts, carried an important political purpose of their own, of fundamental importance both in the formation of imperial service and in the projection of the Emperor himself as a divinely aided ruler and 'perfect man'. Although there were important precedents for moral and sexual regulation of this kind, both in the Timurid cultural inheritance and recorded in histories of the Delhi Sultanate, these Mughal approaches were novel. Akbar and his coterie of reformers, I want to argue, drew on a careful selection of *akhlāqī* themes to construct a socially inclusive model of masculine virtue which transcended law and religion, caste and region. This model emphasised both the natural inner purity of the male body, and the possibilities for moral and human perfection in all three of the homologous worlds that men inhabited as governors: the individual body, the household and the kingdom.

Combined with some key borrowings from sufi and from Sanskrit textual traditions, these themes were politically important in three different ways. First, they helped establish a moral framework for imperial service and for Akbar's own authority that did not seem to depend on religious sanction by Sunni orthodox leaders at court. Second, they provided a powerful means of cementing men to the imperial service that was not only ideological in nature but bodily and physical in very immediate ways. By this appropriation of an eclectic range of norms for ideal manhood, Akbar and the court reformers

¹¹ The literature on Abu'l Fazl as a historian is large, but of variable quality. In addition to Rizvi, see N. Siddiqi, 'Shaikh Abul Fazl' in M. Hasan (ed.), *Historians of Medieval India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1968; Harbans Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography during the Reign of Akbar*, New Delhi: Vikas 1976, and K.A. Nizami, *On the History and Historians of Medieval India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1983.

were able to present imperial service as the best—indeed the only—medium for their realisation. Only through imperial service could a man fully develop his highest virtues as a man. At the same time, this attractive model of elite male virtue magnified men's own authority and emphasised their rights to obedience within their own households and domains. Third, these invocations of male bodily purity and of men's rightful authority as virtuous husbands and rulers of households may have had a wider and more deliberately political intent. In Abu'l Fazl's history, such models of patriarchal and heterosexual male virtue were strongly contrasted with the sexual transgression and unrestrained lust of northern Turanians and of the southern, Iranian-influenced courts of the Deccan. Thus constructions of male sexuality were used to create a local and 'naturalistic' cultural idiom which would reinforce Akbar's more general design to construct a form of local north Indian or Hindustani patriotism. Abu'l Fazl presents this as a unity of virtuous and sexually healthy men each exercising his own rightful powers of moral authority within his own domain: each under the ultimate governance of a father-ruler who looked on the world as his bride and on all his subjects with the equal eye of paternal favour.

In making these arguments, I want to focus on aspects of these ethical and behavioural codes that have attracted relatively little attention from historians. In the main, the *akhlāqī* digests have been explored for their significance as important intellectual bases for longer term Indo-Muslim traditions of thinking about ethical government. Rather less attention has been paid to their concern with man's perfectibility as a moral and physical individual: as a friend, a lover, practitioner of a craft or profession, a husband, parent, master of household. In fact, only the third discourses of many works in this genre actually deal with politics and the state. Thus the first discourse in Tūsī's work deals with *tahzīb-i akhlāq*, 'the correction of dispositions': all of these different aspects of the individual's moral and bodily regulation: with the cultivation of particular inner virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance and equity, and the development of outer physical qualities of hardiness and strength.¹² The second, *tadbīr-i manāzil*, 'regulation of households' treats men as governors of households.¹³ The third, *siyāsat-i mudun*,

¹² M. Minuvi and A.R. Heydari, *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī*, Tehran 1977, 45. Tūsī's work is also published in translation by G.M. Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics*, London: George Allen 1964.

¹³ *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī*, 102.

'the government of cities', deals with the wider realm of state organisation.¹⁴

Thus in drawing on these traditions to project new norms for imperial service, Akbar and his advisers did not focus exclusively on the relationship between the emperor and individual servants, as Richards and others have tended to assume. Equally important were the realms of individual moral and bodily regulation, and the intermediate realm of the household, where virtuous men presided as rulers of their own realms, and where men committed to the social world could both strive towards their own moral and physical perfection and create the best conditions for their wives, children and servants to do the same. As we shall see, moreover, these models of bodily and household government were important not only for imperial servants, but for Akbar himself. As the living embodiment of these masculine virtues and exemplar for his servants, Akbar appears in Abu'l Fazl's history not only as father-ruler of the kingdom, but also as an active and vigilant householder, and commander of his own extraordinary bodily powers.

II. Kingdom, Household and Body: *akhlāqī* Tradition and the Perfection of Moral Being

Let us look first and in more detail, then, at the *akhlāqī* digests which appear as recommended reading at Akbar's court. As Muzaffar Alam has noted, these digests entered Mughal political culture in a variety of versions and recensions, but Tūsi's *Akhlāq-i Nāsiri* was preferred as most authoritative.¹⁵ Abu'l Fazl lists it first of the works from the imperial library that Akbar had regularly read out to him.¹⁶ It is mentioned again as prescribed reading in Akbar's instructions about personal conduct and duties of work circulated in March 1594 to different classes of imperial officials. As Alam has noted, these instructions owe much to the precepts of the genre.¹⁷ Again, in the

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 145. For the internal structure of other *akhlāqī* works, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 52. See also Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005. This important study of the Mughal harem was published after the present article was written, and so it has not been possible to engage with its arguments here.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶ Abu'l Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, edited by H. Blochmann, Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica 1872, i, *ā'in tasvīrkhāne*, 115.

¹⁷ This circular is reproduced in Mansura Haidar (ed.), *Mukātabāt-i Allāmī (Inshā'i Abu'l Fazl)* Daftar 1, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal 1998, 79.

late 1580s, Tūsī's work was singled out for copying and elaborate illustration in the imperial library, where books were kept, copied, gilded, illustrated and bound.¹⁸ The popularity of the work is also reflected negatively, as when Abu'l Fazl urged the Khan-i Khanan 'Abd al-Rahim, embarked in the early 1590s on the conquest of Qandahar, to read heroic works such as the *Zafar-nāma* recounting the exploits of Timur, the *Shāh-nāma* of Firdausi and the *Chengiz-nāma*, rather than works such as the *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī*, which was ascetic rather than heroic in spirit.¹⁹

Like other intellectuals in the Mediterranean, west Asian and Indo-Muslim worlds, Tūsī explored the potential of man as an individual for virtue and the nature of the household and the wider political order best fitted to help the subjects to realise this potential most fully. Man as an individual, both in his bodily and his spiritual aspects, the domestic world of the household and the wider polity were best understood as communities of constituent members, each with their own natures. The key to unlocking man's potential for virtue lay essentially in the proper government of these communities, the ordering of the base by the nobler elements, such as to bring each into harmony and equilibrium. Thus Tūsī presented man's inner being as composed of three differing elements: the rational faculty or angelic soul, *naḥs-i malakī*, the source of thought and judgement, which was located in the brain, seat of reflection and reason; the irascible faculty or savage soul, *naḥs-i sabu'ī*, the source of anger, bravery and drive for dominance, and located in the heart, source of all innate heat in the body; and the appetitive faculty or bestial soul, *naḥs-i bahīmī*, the source of lust, hunger and desire for sensual gratification, and seated in the liver, the body's organ of nutrition and circulation.²⁰ When the second and third were brought into equilibrium under the proper government of the rational faculty, the two produced virtues according to their natures, of courage and temperance respectively. When all three were mixed and blended together, a man's moral being reached its highest state of perfection in the fourth and noblest virtue, that of equity or justice, *'adālat*.²¹ The man who achieved this state of perfect self-realisation was a complete and absolute man,

¹⁸ Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry, *Akbar's India*, 124.

¹⁹ Riazul Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations (1500–1750)* i, Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1979, 115.

²⁰ *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī*, 58.

²¹ *ibid.*, 109.

insānī-yī tāmm-i mutlaq whose invariable accompaniment was the quality of *sulh-i kull*, universal concord.²² From this universalist perspective, there were elements of the divine essence in all men; evil and discord in the world arose only within man, and from what was bodily and animal in his nature. Since there was thus truth and falsity in every religion, dogmatism and persecution were inimical to the true religious life, which should seek rather to understand all religious beliefs rather than to promote strife between them. Since virtue was a matter of discipline, the real struggle lay within a man, in the effort to wean his soul of bad customs and his daily life of unworthy habits, to study the different faculties composing his moral constitution and strive to bring each of them into proper equilibrium.²³

This inner soul regulated and controlled the physical body by means of the latter's faculties and organs. The body was not simply a receptacle for the soul; rather, the body was a tool and an instrument, *badan ālati u adāti ast*, like the tools and instruments used by artisans and craftsmen'.²⁴ For most men, the essential setting for these elements of psychical and bodily regulation was the household. In the household were furnished the material supports for life; here took place the essential moral training of children; here a man might find in the marital relationship a partner in preserving his property, a pleasant companion, a mother for his progeny and a means of controlling his sensual appetites. Again, the key to felicity in household matters lay in the proper governance and regulation of the home by its head. For Tūsī, the family was like the human body itself. Each element of the household was like one of the limbs of the body, some with lesser roles and responsibilities, some with greater. Some ruled and some were ruled, according to their natures, while the head of the household stood in relation to its constituent members as a physician did in relation to the body, understanding the natures of each of its constituent limbs and seeking to promote the equilibrium among its members that ensured its harmonious action as a whole.²⁵

The rules for a man's conduct of his household were specified minutely. Most important was propriety in marriage itself. For Tūsī, there were three means whereby a man assured his proper authority over his wife: to keep her occupied, to inspire respect in her, and to

²² *ibid.*, 71.

²³ *ibid.*, 149–154.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 56.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 108–9.

show her favour. Part of showing favour was limiting himself to one wife, for women's capacity for jealousy and their deficiency in understanding would otherwise necessarily lead them to disorderly acts that would bring disgrace on the household. Only kings, with their need for numerous progeny, could be excepted from this rule, but even here, caution was necessary, for the man in the household was like the heart in the body, *mard dar manzil manānd dil bāshad dar badan*, and just as one heart cannot sustain life in two bodies, so one man could not easily manage two households.²⁶ The moral and physical education of children was also set out in great detail. Boys and young men were enjoined to self-control, hardiness and abstinence, taught veneration for parents and preceptors, propriety in speech, dignity in eating and movement, self-restraint in dress, and the avoidance of conduct appropriate to women and eunuchs, such as brightly coloured or embroidered clothes, arranged hair and affected manners of walking. Daughters should be encouraged in modesty and continence, prevented from learning to read or write but allowed to acquire such accomplishments as were appropriate to women.²⁷

III. Akbar as Emperor: The Household and the Body

Let us look first, then, at Akbar's own appropriation of these *akhlaqī* models, as set out in Abu'l Fazl's history. Commissioned in 1590 from his minister Abu'l Fazl, to whom the contents of the imperial record office, as well as the specially commissioned memoirs of longstanding courtiers and court servants were made available, the *Akbar-Nāma* and the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* together formed one of the most important means of conveying to a wider court the nature of Akbar's authority and its meaning for his imperial servants. Abu'l Fazl made it clear that not only the detailed imperial regulations of the *Ā'in*, but the history set out in the *Akbar-Nāma* was philosophy teaching by example. It was intended 'as a lesson book for the instruction of mankind and as a moral treatise for the practical teaching of subjects in the right conduct of life'.²⁸ What conveyed this moral and practical instruction so vividly was not only Abu'l Fazl's detailed recounting of important events in Akbar's rulership, but their illustration in the increasingly

²⁶ *ibid.*, 218.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 200–214.

²⁸ *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, iii, 251.

lavish paintings produced to accompany the histories. These paintings both displayed Akbar's individual vitality as warrior, hunter and commander of elephants, and depicted his dynamic presence amongst his courtiers, nobles, clerics and subjects, ranked as witnesses to important court events, in hunting and battle, or travelling with the emperor to distant parts of his domains.²⁹

What is also striking about many of these paintings is their strong sense of place in a north Indian landscape, reflecting Akbar's role not only as divine king, moral exemplar and dispenser of justice, but as a ruler profoundly attuned to the subtle ecological balance of the land and its people. Nizami rightly suggests that Akbar's command of the animal as well as the human and the spiritual worlds completed the circle of his authority.³⁰ Particularly in the paintings of the first *Akbar-Nāma*, Akbar is portrayed in dynamic interaction with these worlds. In some illustrations he himself embodies its energies with his own intense vitality, as he hunts in scenes swirling with the lithe bodies of game, leaps astride a wild elephant as his terrified retainers flee from its trampling or leaps forward on his horse to plunge his sword into the neck of a ferocious looking tiger emerging from the undergrowth.³¹ Other hunting scenes depict a different kind of merging with the landscape, as in the painting of Akbar lost and exhausted while hunting wild asses in Multan in 1571. Here, Akbar sits mute and sorrowful under a tree surrounded by the bodies of slain animals, his still outline following the lines of the rocks around him as his gesticulating retainers run frantically towards him.³² In others, he is the calm pivot around which all activity centres, journeying through a verdant landscape on pilgrimage to the shrine of Muin al-Din Chishti at Ajmer to give thanks for the birth of his son, inspecting the work of Indian artisans constructing the new city of Fatehpur-Sikri, holding the balance between argumentative divines and learned men at the

²⁹ There are two known major illustrated manuscripts of the *Akbar-Nāma*, both incomplete. The earlier, presented to the emperor in 1596, is in the Victorian and Albert Museum, London; the second, probably initiated in 1597, is in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. Milo Cleveland Beach, *The Imperial Image*, 83–4.

³⁰ K.A. Nizami, *Akbar and Religion*, Delhi: IAD Oriental 1989, 185.

³¹ See, for example, Victoria and Albert Museum *Akbar-Nāma*, IS 2:70/71–1896 for Akbar hunting at Palam in 1868; IS 2:21/2–1986 for Akbar's adventure on the elephant Hawa'i in 1561, and IS 2:17/18–1896 for Akbar's tiger hunt in Gwalior in 1561.

³² V and A *Akbar-Nāma*, IS 2:84–1896.

new city or calmly commanding a perilous shipboard expedition to suppress the turbulent in his eastern domains.³³

If the new naturalism encouraged in the imperial atelier thus conveyed an important political message, so also did the powerful language of paternity in Abu'l Fazl's text. Akbar appeared at once as awesome king, a particular kind of divinely inspired father to his 'household', and as the embodiment of a male virtue for which the body was not just a receptacle, but the direct instrument of the soul. In his preface to the *Ā'in*, and as a continuing theme in the *Akbar-Nāma*, Abu'l Fazl makes it clear that it is a combination of divine illumination and inner attributes which enable a virtuous king such as Akbar to achieve the state of *sulh-i kull*, to extend the right kind of paternal tolerance and conciliation towards his subjects.³⁴ This form of a king's divinely ordained authority was reflected in the term 'shah' itself, with its wider connotations of stability, lordship and possession, but the term was also, he pointed out, applied to a bridegroom, for the world, as the king's bride, betrothed herself to the king and became his worshipper.³⁵ Royalty was also a light emanating from God, from possession of which flowed many of the qualities of the ideal man: a paternal love for his subjects, a large and courageous heart which enabled him to see to the needs of all and encounter imperfection with equanimity; and devotion to God, which helped him to meet success and adversity with equal self-control, and so to conduct himself with compassion towards his imperfect subjects.³⁶ These qualities enabled him to watch over the health of the body politic and to apply remedies to its diseases. For, as Abu'l Fazl explained, just as the health of an animal depended on the equilibrium of its different inner elements, so also did the body politic, such that with the right degree of concord, a multitude of people become fused into one body.³⁷

Thus perfect in his moral being, at once husband and father to his realm, Akbar's heavy paternal presence pervaded Abu'l Fazl's work. He was an all-seeing and omnipresent father minutely supervising every aspect of his great household and of the behaviour of his children.

³³ V and A *Akbar-Nāma*, IS 2:77–1896 for the pilgrimage to Ajmer; IS 2:91–1896 for the construction of Fatehpur-Sikri, and the later *Akbar-Nāma* in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, for Akbar's discussions with clerics and divines and for his shipboard expedition to the eastern provinces.

³⁴ See, for example, the descriptions in *Akbar-Nāma* i, 5, and ii, 285.

³⁵ *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, i, 2.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 3.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 3–4.

While some rulers thought the detail of administration beneath them, Akbar knew better, supervising every department and keeping a constant watch on all of the little offices and workshops in the imperial household, each one of which was like a city in itself.³⁸ The emperor displayed the same qualities in his supervision of the female parts of the household, allotting apartments, setting allowances, laying down duties and appointing guards.³⁹ This image of an essentially paternal authority also emerged in the practices described in the *Akbar-Nāma* too. It was, of course, expressed in the well-established Mughal category of the *khāna-zād*, the 'houseborn', used to describe particularly long-standing and devoted imperial servants.⁴⁰ Again, when Akbar wanted to show servants particular favour, he formally bestowed on them the title *farzand*, 'child', as he did on the soldier Kuar Man Singh, despatched with an army against the Rana of Jodhpur in 1576.⁴¹ The same divine authority of fatherhood emerged in Abu'l Fazl's description of Akbar's own father Humayun. His early death was divinely ordained: he had to die so that the young Akbar, rising irresistibly to power, avoided the impropriety of authority over his worldly father.⁴²

In these ways, the image of fatherhood and household government was central to the construction of Akbar's rulership, but in ways that carried a wider significance than is suggested in Stephen Blake's account of the patrimonial dimensions to Mughal imperial authority. Abu'l Fazl's emphasis on his paternal qualities drew on *akhlaqī* models to create a local and naturalistic idiom for a father-ruler who would look on all of his numerous dependents with the same paternal benevolence, and so justly demanded their obedience. As a form of 'natural' authority, this seemed to be beyond the need for orthodox endorsement, while its social inclusiveness transcended the prescriptions of any particular religion. Moreover, this projection of the authority of all fathers and heads of households was likely to have a wider appeal, and particularly to high imperial servants themselves. As Blake reminds us, the households of imperial nobles were themselves constructed as miniature replicas of the imperial court, centres both of ritual and of economic activity, and these were the foci of noble

³⁸ *ibid.*, *ā'in manzil ābādī*, 8–9.

³⁹ *ibid.*, *ā'in-i shabistān-i iqbal*, 40.

⁴⁰ John Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 148–9.

⁴¹ *Akbar-Nāma* iii, 166.

⁴² *ibid.*, i, 365.

authority within their wider domains.⁴³ In accepting Akbar's supreme power, imperial servants were provided with a very attractive model which dramatised their own authority and confirmed their rights to obedience in their own domains.

If Akbar was thus a divinely inspired father and householder, his bodily being likewise attested to his extraordinary and numinous qualities. Many historians have remarked on the prominence of martial themes in Abu'l Fazl's construction of Akbar as emperor: themes which echoed the codes of martial honour among prospective client communities, and helped serve the needs of Mughal military expansion. However, the particular form of Akbar's warriorship and personal heroism had a more important and particular significance. At crucial public moments, the emperor's own body became an active instrument for his soul, when his qualities found real physical embodiment and demonstrated themselves in the most concrete ways to his awestruck servants. In presenting himself as a warrior, therefore, Akbar needed to negotiate in very careful ways between these elements of his self-construction and other Indo-Muslim and indigenous north Indian norms for ideal warriorship: the ideal of the individual *ghazi* or self-immolating martyr of the Indo-Muslim martial tradition, or Rajput models of self-sacrifice in the protection of personal or lineage honour. As Richards has argued, it was important to be able to transmute these values into those of the disciplined military servant, who could put the defence of wider imperial interests above that of his own individual or group honour.⁴⁴

However, it was also very important for Akbar personally to be able to incorporate and transcend these models: to demonstrate equal or superior elements of raw physical courage and strength, but in ways which dissociated these qualities from unrestrained martial rage and placed them into the more complex, balanced and self-controlled context of Akbar's personality as *insān-i kamīl*, 'the perfect man'. It may have been for this reason, therefore, that in Abu'l Fazl's account Akbar's physical bravery and martial skills did not emerge so much on the battlefield, as in hunting and other military sports, and in elephant fighting. Many historians have observed that these were a way of honing important battle skills for Mughal heavy cavalry, and provided the major means by which the Mughal court achieved vital frequent

⁴³ Stephen Blake, *Shahjahanabad*, 96–7.

⁴⁴ John Richards, 'The formulation of imperial authority under Akbar and Jahangir', 275.

contact with its far-flung networks of servants and supporters.⁴⁵ But hunting was also a principal form of self-expression for Akbar himself, in which outer bodily action was voice and instrument for inner spiritual purposes of many different kinds. Hunting provided a chance to hold direct communion with wandering hermits and ascetics.⁴⁶ Hunting made it possible to penetrate the secrets of the future through omens, as when Akbar campaigned against Muhammad Husain Mirza in Surat in 1573, and predicted that if one of the imperial hunting cheetahs caught a buck this would be a sign that victory over Muhammad Husain would follow.⁴⁷ Hunting, with its parallels with battle, was also an opportunity to discover the inner qualities of imperial servants.⁴⁸ As a form of paternal supervision of the whole kingdom, testing its men and discovering its secrets, hunting was itself a means of divine worship.⁴⁹ It was also in hunting, as we have seen, that the emperor appeared in closest communion with the north Indian landscape.

It followed on from these connections as Abu'l Fazl described them, that Akbar experienced his great moment of spiritual enlightenment while he was hunting. In May 1578, just a year before his major break with the orthodox Sunni leadership at court, Akbar was hunting along the banks of the Jhelum River in Punjab. As the circle of beaters closing around the game, Akbar was suddenly filled with a sublime joy and drawn by a sense of spiritual communion with God. In gratitude for his spiritual illumination, he ordered that the hunt be stopped and the thousands of animals caught up by the beaters be allowed to go free. Here, of course, there are elements of appeal not so much to Rajput values as to more Brahmanic Hindu prohibitions on the taking of life. Thereafter Akbar began to restrain himself in hunting and restrict himself to a vegetarian diet on set day. The experience also, Abu'l Fazl recorded, drew him even more strongly to a life of ascetic withdrawal from the world, but he contented himself with shortening his hair in the manner of ascetics, and many of his disciples followed his example.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ For a general discussion of hunting in Mughal court culture, see M.N. Pearson, 'Recreation in Mughal India', *British Journal of Sports History*, December 1984.

⁴⁶ *Akbar-Nāma*, iii, 241.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 44–5.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, ii, 150.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 348–9.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, iii, 241–3.

The other major means that Akbar employed to demonstrate his courage and strength lay in his use of elephants. Akbar maintained a stable of magnificent animals for military and ceremonial use, seven separate *Ā'in* being devoted to their classification, food, servants and trappings. The possession of elephants and the staging of elephant combats were, of course, powerful symbols of royalty in the Indian setting. One of the first signs of disloyalty in Mughal servants was often misappropriation of elephants whose disposal rightfully belonged to the emperor, as when Bairam Khan distributed some of the royal elephants amongst his officers.⁵¹ In the illustrations of the *Akbar-Nāma*, contests between royal and 'rebel' elephants symbolised the struggle between Akbar's own authority and that of his rebellious servants.⁵² However, Akbar's use of elephants went beyond these general associations, to suggest a subtle anthropomorphism that again emphasised the naturalness of Akbar's identification with his north Indian domains. Abu'l Fazl's descriptions suggest that Akbar saw embodied in the greatest elephants his own qualities as a king, in their combination of overwhelming physical power and intelligence, their capacity sometimes for anger and sometimes for gentleness.⁵³ Abu'l Fazl's description of Bal Sundar, one of the elephants taken in the 1574 expedition against Daud in Bengal, recall the qualities of Akbar as king. Bal Sundar had the strength to pull down mountains and break the ranks of armies, but always retained perfect control of himself and obedience to his driver, never losing his judgement even in the height of *mast*.⁵⁴

At one moment Akbar's surrogates, elephants were at other times instruments for another kind of self-expression. Abu'l Fazl frequently described Akbar's public riding of powerful elephants in *mast*, and these formed the subject of some of the most dramatic scenes in the first *Akbar-Nāma*. These feats were not only a stunning demonstration of Akbar's personal courage; they also dramatically revealed to onlookers his transcendent proximity to God, who seemed to hold him in the hands of special divine protection. On one occasion in Delhi, the rider of a furious elephant lost his seat and fell to the ground. As terror seized the court onlookers, Akbar seized the elephant's rope and got his foot into it, and fought to gain control of the elephant until loyal men were

⁵¹ *Akbar-Nāma*, ii, 62.

⁵² See, for example, V and A *Akbar-Nāma* IS 2:115–1896.

⁵³ *Akbar-Nāma*, ii, 72.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, iii, 87.

able to come to his aid. After the elephant had freed itself, Akbar mounted it again serenely and rode it back to his quarters. Through such splendid acts, Abu'l Fazl concluded, the rebellious received proper warning, and the loyal were confirmed in their devotion.⁵⁵ These displays could also form a key part of political negotiation and alliance forming, as when Akbar followed up his presentation of robes of honour to his new Rajput ally Bhar Mal Kachwaha, by mounting an elephant in *mast*. The Rajput contingent impressed Akbar favourably by standing their ground when the elephant charged towards them.⁵⁶

There may have remained moments, however, in which Akbar felt the tension between these highly controlled expressions of physical courage and spiritual power, and the simpler Rajput ideals of direct personal sacrifice. Abu'l Fazl recounted how one night during a drinking party in 1573, the conversation turned to the extraordinary courage of warriors in Hindusthan. Some of the company present asserted that one Rajput method of resolving a dispute between rivals was to take up a double headed spear, and the two men would run from opposite sides against the points. Stung by this extraordinary mode of feud resolution, Akbar fastened the hilt of his sword to a wall, and prepared to impale himself upon it, declaring that if Rajputs could do this, so also could he. His companions were dumbstruck, and Akbar's loyal Rajput servant Man Singh ran forward to deflect the sword.⁵⁷

Thus, Akbar as warrior hero was a very complex figure, transcending the ideals both of individual warrior and of disciplined Mughal commander. These displays of physical courage, bodily instruments for the soul, placed him in a very special intermediary position between God and the world and identified him very clearly with the social and natural worlds of north India. Inwardly he was constantly with God, testing men and discovering the secrets of the kingdom; outwardly, he lived in the world and enjoyed its pleasures.

IV. Codes for Imperial Servants: Models for Moral Self-government

For Abu'l Fazl, these carefully crafted accounts had a primary normative purpose. Akbar stood forth as a perfect exemplar to his servants.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, ii, 73–4.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, ii, 45.

⁵⁷ *Akbar-Nāma*, iii, 31.

He called them to religious devotion in its highest form, expressed not in outward observance or rigid dogma, but in service to the empire. Thus immersed in worldly concerns, the imperial servant could likewise strive to remain inwardly free, having through constant self-examination and struggle subdued his own inner passions and appetites. Thus the code for imperial service was not simply one of loyalty to the emperor, but of constant striving for the qualities that both developed a man's highest nature as a man, and made him fit for the ultimate form of worship: imperial service.

How, then, were these norms and models incorporated into a wider imperial ethic, and transmitted to imperial servants? Elevation in the imperial service was itself a test and a training, as Abu'l Fazl described. Bestowing his trust enabled Akbar to see what men were made of. The emperor's trust was like a draught of heady wine, which only strong men could drink.⁵⁸ For the wider circles of lower level imperial officers, the *dastūr al-ʿamal* referred to above would have been one means of disseminating these messages. As Alam has noted, this manual of practical and moral instruction clearly owes much to the spirit of the *akhlāqī* tracts. Imperial servants were urged to read Tūsī's work, portions of the work of the medieval theologian Ghazali, the sufi poetry of Rumi and the moral fables of Kalīla Damna. They should exercise moderation in all things, maintain constant vigilance, should consult, should know when to punish and when to be lenient; should hunt for military exercise; should exercise close supervision of the towns and neighbourhoods under their authority, and should take steps against wine-drinking except where it was for medical purposes and for intellectual stimulation.⁵⁹

For the smaller group of Akbar's closer courtiers and adherents, most important was the presentation of Akbar himself as an exemplar and moral guide: not only in the daily management of imperial and courtly affairs, but in the institution of discipleship. Akbar developed this as a part of his decisive break in late 1579 with orthodox Sunni opinion at the court, when the key orthodox leaders Makhdumu'l Mulk and Shaikh 'Abdu'n Nabi were exiled to Mecca after bitter controversy over the legal standing of Akbar's many marriages. The significance and wider social consequences of Akbar's new role as 'spiritual leader' have been the subject of much historical debate.⁶⁰ Despite

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, ii, 22.

⁵⁹ *Mukātabāt-i Allāmī (Inshāʿi Abu'l Fazl)*, 79–87.

⁶⁰ Akbar's role as spiritual guide, *rah-namūnī*, is set out in *ā'in rah-namūnī, Ā'in-i Akbarī*, i, 158–161. For an analysis, see K.A. Nizami, *Akbar and Religion*, 132–49.

Abu'l Fazl's assertion that many thousands of people, of all classes, accepted the principles of this 'new faith', the numbers of courtiers actually named as having done so is relatively small.⁶¹ The institution of discipleship itself drew eclectically on *akhlāqī* norms, *ishrāqī* illuminationist thinking, the relationship between sufi pir and disciple and Brahmanic Hindu dietary codes. At noon on Sundays, groups of neophytes swore to accept four degrees of devotion to Akbar: to sacrifice life, property, religion and honour in the service of the master. Muslim servants undertook to worship Allah directly, without intermediaries. Abu'l Fazl described the rituals of submission and renewal. The novice took his turban in his hands and put his head on the Emperor's feet, indicating that he had cast aside inner conceit and selfishness, and now came to offer his heart in devotion and seek after truth. Akbar would then raise the man up and replace his turban on his head, symbolising the man's entry into a new life of service and devotion.⁶² Beyond these four degrees of devotion lay a further ultimate goal for the most inwardly accomplished. This was to realise within themselves the four cardinal virtues of *hikmat*, prudence or wisdom; *shajā'at*, courage; *'iffat*, temperance or chastity; and *'adālat*, justice or equity, virtues that were produced when the three different elements of *akhlāqī* tradition—the rational, the savage and the appetitive—were mixed and blended together in proper equilibrium. Disciples agreed to observe particular regulations: a special mode of greeting, alms-giving, periodic abstention from meat and avoidance of those involved in its slaughter; and to avoid sexual contact with pregnant women, with the old, and with girls under the age of puberty.⁶³ Although the numbers of those formally admitted as disciples were small, however, it is significant that even here *akhlāqī* norms were central to the path of self-development offered to imperial servants.

How, then, did these emphases on moral disposition fit in with the other qualities expected of imperial servants? As constituent members of the realm, imperial servants were each seen as possessing their own particular aptitudes, depending on their own inner balance of faculties. This inner balance differed with different classes of men, but what mattered was the wider structure of a man's moral and physical disposition, defined by inner *akhlāqī* qualities of balance and

⁶¹ *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, i, 160; for the numbers mentioned in Abu'l Fazl and Badauni, see Blochmann's translation of the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, 1994 reprint, i, 218–9.

⁶² *Ā'in-i Akbarī* i, 160.

⁶³ *ibid.*, i, 161.

judgement, self-control and perfect paternal care in the conduct of office. Abu'l Fazl identified these vital inner qualities in his prefatory discussion to the *Ā'in*, where he discussed the classes of men who serve the court. The great lords of state were not only courageous in battle and efficient in administration, but possessed crucial moral qualities of wisdom, firmness, magnanimity, skill and discretion in the conduct of business, and the ability to deal openly and impartially with friends and enemies.⁶⁴ In the description of particular offices, there is the same emphasis on inner qualities and self-control. Thus a provincial viceroy should be a man prudent, careful and discreet, controlling alike his impulses to wrath and levity, carefully selecting honest and truthful servants, sleeping and eating in moderation, and schooling himself in works of philosophy when the duties of his office allowed. The question of self-scrutiny was particularly important, and such officers were urged to allow a trusted friend to scrutinise their daily conduct and learn from their criticisms, since most associates would find it difficult to offer an honest view. Such an officer was also enjoined to observe some of the bodily restraints associated with discipleship, in particular periodic abstinence from meat and avoidance of sexual contact with certain classes of women.⁶⁵

V. Codes for Imperial Servants: The Body and Sexual Regulation

The regulations for disciples described above formed a part of Akbar's wider attempt to use marriage, sexual and bodily regulation in the effort to disseminate the norm of the devoted and self-controlled imperial servant. In these well-publicised programmes for social and moral regulation, Akbar was, of course, following a well-established medieval north Indian tradition. Many of the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate sought to extend their systems of social surveillance, to prohibit intoxicants and gambling, to punish debauchery, to impose sumptuary laws restraining nobles from too elaborate gold and brocade dress, and to impose strict regulation on the prices of commodities in the market. The historian Ziya al-Din Barani, for example, recorded that 'Ala al-Din Khalji expanded his networks of spies and informers to detect sedition amongst his nobles, forbade the consumption of

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, i, 4.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, ii, *ā'in-i sipah-sālār*, 282.

alcohol and other intoxicants, suppressed gambling, imposed harsh penalties for debauchery, limited the ability of nobles to meet and entertain one another, punished revenue officers caught cheating, and laid down strict controls upon the prices of grains and other basic commodities in the markets.⁶⁶ In his *Futūhāt-i Fīrūzshāhī*, Firuz Tughlaq also described the regulations he imposed as a pious Muslim. He stopped women making religious visits to the tombs of pirs as it was a cause of licentiousness, imposed new sumptuary laws and banned the decoration of domestic and military items with pictures and portraits, as it was against religious law.⁶⁷ Contemporary accounts describe similar forms of regulation under the Lodis, including the appointment of *muhtasahibān*, officials to look after public morality and prevent the violation of religious law, and the careful regulation of prices of commodities in the market.⁶⁸ These emphases were not, of course, unique to the Sultanate, but formed an important theme in the Timurid cultural inheritance that Babur and his successors claimed as the basis of their legitimacy and prestige.⁶⁹ Timur's own regulations, bequeathed to his successors for the conduct of government and preservation of his kingdom, emphasised that strong kingdoms were based in morality and religion as well as equity and good understanding of the subjects and set out the forms of judgement to be passed on subjects guilty of crimes such as assault, adultery and wine-drinking.⁷⁰ More broadly, of course, these emphases on bodily regulation drew on a long tradition of concern with bodily purification and bodily comportment that permeated the Mediterranean, west Asian and Indo Muslim worlds. Within the world of medieval Islamic ethics, these techniques for bodily purification were revived and developed most extensively in the work of the theologian Ghazali, who elaborated an exhaustive and meticulous set of techniques for bodily care and cleansing that would restore the Muslim's body to its proper state

⁶⁶ Ziyā al-Dīn Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, edited by Shaikh Abdur Rashid, Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University 1957.

⁶⁷ N.B. Roy (ed.), 'The victories of Sultan Firuz Shah of Tughluq Dynasty', *Islamic Culture* 15, 1941. The Persian text is reprinted in N.B. Roy, 'Futūhāt-i-Fīrūzshāhī', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, VII, 1941, 61–89.

⁶⁸ Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, *Waqi'at-e-Mushtaqi of Shaikh Rizq Ullah Mushtaqi*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research 1993, 17–19.

⁶⁹ Richard C. Folz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001, 21–8.

⁷⁰ W. Davy (ed), *Institutes of Timur*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1783, 175 and 253, Persian and English text.

of purity.⁷¹ As Bouhdiba has described, such techniques represented a constant attention paid to the physiological life of the body, to the art of experiencing its corporeality and the means of continually resacralising it.⁷²

It is possible to see a range of connected rationales behind the moral and social regulation of the Sultanate period, and the publicity given to it in the accounts of contemporary chroniclers. The latter, of course, offered a natural way to advertise the Sultan's virtues as a pious protector of Islam. These measures themselves reflected the complex economic, military and political challenges facing the rulers of the Sultanate, as they sought to consolidate their territories, to develop more centralised state forms, to raise tax revenues to support a large standing army against the Mongol military threat and to forge a more composite nobility out of local Indian and Turkish, Iranian, Tajik, Afghan and other immigrants.⁷³ Central to the period was the drive, under 'Ala al-Din Khalji in particular, to raise tax revenues in order to support the burgeoning cities and a very large standing army. The means here was to increase the area of crown land from which dues came directly in to the treasury, to impose a range of new taxes, to raise the tax level on the estimated yield, to ensure that the treasury received its stipulated share of revenues from land assigned to state servants, and to ensure that prices of basic commodities were kept stable and low as a means of offsetting these increased fiscal burdens.⁷⁴ These measures meant inevitably that officers and merchants came under increasingly close supervision, a supervision extending also to elite social connections more generally as a means of detecting sedition and anticipating rebellion. The sumptuary laws may have been part of the effort to make the new financial pressures more acceptable, while the regulation of gambling, sexual excess and intoxicants demonstrated the virtues of pious Islamic rulership.

In many ways, however, the moral regulation developed at the Mughal court was different. It was not simply prohibitive or repressive, although elements of it were. Its purpose rather was creative: to promote a new set of norms for elite male virtue which emphasised the

⁷¹ M.M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, i, 581–642.

⁷² Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, London: Saqi Books 1988, 56.

⁷³ Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals*. New Delhi: Har-anand Publications 1997, 75–113.

⁷⁴ Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, 242–53.

rights and authority of imperial servants and disciples as husbands, fathers and rulers of households. In Abu'l Fazl's account, Akbar did much more than to punish adulterers or curb the temptations that public worship offered to women. He also held out a very particular model of ideal and spiritual marriage, tried to construct new norms around the 'natural' purity of the male body, and conducted a very public campaign to discourage overt homosexual attachments, in which he juxtaposed his patriarchal and heterosexual model of north Indian male virtue against the corrupt practices of central Asian outsiders on the one hand, and the southern, Iranian-influenced courts of the Deccan on the other. Here, again, as described in Abu'l Fazl's account, Akbar viewed the body precisely in the manner we have seen enjoined in Tūsī: not as a passive receptacle, but as an active tool and instrument for the soul.

For evidence in all of these areas, we need to look to the contemporary history of 'Abd al-Qadir Badauni, the thwarted and choleric orthodox opponent of Abu'l Fazl and his coterie of reformers. Badauni's notoriously vituperative history, written between 1591 and 1595, presents the latter in very different terms, as a clique of apostates and heretics bent on the destruction of Islam and the founding of a new religion. At the end of his history, he explained that his own purpose was to set out a true account of the revolution in laws and in manners that he had witnessed at Akbar's court. Fear, greed, ambition or ignorance prevented other observers at court from making such a record. So in secrecy and haste Badauni had put together his own version, which would expiate his sin in having made translations of the Sanskrit classics at Akbar's behest, and furnish for succeeding generations, confused and dissatisfied with official histories, a true account and a proof that right had been on the side of Islam.⁷⁵ As is well known, Badauni's deliberately subversive history thus contains much illuminating social detail, of a kind which did not find its way into Abu'l Fazl's reverent account. However, it may be that historians have overlooked the significance of some of this detail. Studies of Badauni in recent years have tended rather to invoke a series of clichés to explain his motives in writing and the kinds of issues which interested him. Religious dogma, thwarted ambition and personal jealousy of the more successful Abu'l Fazl impelled him to write. Driven by such negative and personal motives, he was unable to produce any kind

⁷⁵ 'Abd al-Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, ed. W.N. Lees and Ahmad Ali, Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica 1865, iii, 393–5.

of constructive critique of the serious questions of state policy or political change. He vented his energies instead in personal attacks and slanderous anecdotes about contemporaries.⁷⁶

This understanding of Badauni's purposes and interests overlooks what may have been a central part of his political agenda. It is an understanding of which Abu'l Fazl himself might have approved, with its implicit dismissal of many of Badauni's concerns as personal bitterness or cultural marginalia. Much in Badauni that has been seen as incidental human anecdote or social tittle-tattle may well have represented an attempt to record those areas in which Akbar's efforts at sexual and bodily regulation encountered resistance, distortion and ridicule. Badauni's critique here is often fragmentary, although this is in part a reflection of his separate treatment of each year's developments, and it is almost always laced with malice. But what is striking about it is its sense of the importance of changing bodily norms at Akbar's court, and hence, from his own perspective, of the need to subvert respectful official accounts such as those of Abu'l Fazl.

Thus documented in Abu'l Fazl's history, the institution of marriage formed a principal instrument of bodily and sexual regulation, with its very obvious interconnections between the realms of the body, the moral disposition and the community. Akbar's own strategic marriages with women from leading Rajput families as well as imperial nobles themselves are, of course, well known to historians.⁷⁷ His concern with the marriages of his servants was rather different: aimed at promoting a particular model of ideal marriage, in which mature men could realise the ethic of imperial service, women enjoy peace and companionship and homes fructify with children and sons to worship God. Akbar thus emerged as guardian of these values of ideal marriage. In the *ā'in* concerning marriage, Abu'l Fazl stressed its importance as a means of preserving stability amongst men, preventing the outbreak of evil passions and promoting the establishment of homes. The ideal marriage had important inner moral dimensions of spiritual union and equality of essence, which demanded the consent not only of parents and elders, but of the couple

⁷⁶ For examples of these approaches, see Muhammad Mujeeb, 'Badauni', in M. Hasan (ed.), *Historians of Medieval India*; Harbans Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography*, pp. 89–131; and Fauzia Zareen Abbas, *Abdul Qadir Badauni*, Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli 1987.

⁷⁷ Norman P. Ziegler, 'Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties during the Mughal Period' in J.F. Richards (ed.) *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, University of Wisconsin, Madison 1981.

themselves, who should also be of sufficient maturity to be able to enjoy a sexual as well as an emotional union. Abu'l Fazl asserted that Akbar strongly disliked marriages that took place before the age of puberty, as being less likely to prosper when the couple reached adulthood. For most men, one wife was quite enough; more than this risked damaging a man's health, and destroying the peace of his home. Abu'l Fazl also detailed the arrangements Akbar made to enforce them more widely. Two sober and sensible men had been appointed, one to enquire into the circumstances of the bridegroom, and the other into those of the bride. There was a graded tax payable for this service, with differing amounts stipulated for different ranks of imperial servants, from the highest officers of state to petty commanders. Ordinary people were also included, and the officers instructed to pay regard to the circumstances of the father of the bride.⁷⁸ It is difficult to know, of course, how widely these regulations were applied at court. Certainly in Badauni's account, however, these were not merely paper rules, and their effects were far-reaching. What they did, in fact, was to open up great opportunities for corruption, as officials and police officers found opportunities to extract bribes from those who did not meet the new standards.⁷⁹

Viewed from this perspective, Akbar's early and deep divisions in the mid 1570's with the old guard of court clerics over the legal standing of his own many marriages may take on a new meaning. Challenges from the Sunni orthodox here hit squarely at his own self-construction as guardian of the values of ideal marriage. It may have been this that impelled him to take up the question with such uncompromising determination. Our major source for this dispute is again Badauni, who was prominent in leading the discussions in Akbar's favour. At one such public discussion, Akbar asked the clerics how many freeborn women a man was allowed to marry by the *nikah* form, sanctioned in Islamic jurisprudence. The clerics replied that it was four, whereupon Akbar asked what he should do about his own case, given that he had married many more than that. The clerics were unable to agree, so Akbar sent for the conservative Shaikh 'Abd al-Nabī, who refused to sanction the marriages as lawful. After much acrimonious argument, the orthodox Qāzī Ya'qūb, Abu'l Fazl, Hājī Ibrāhīm and others were invited for a discussion, and Abu'l Fazl laid before the Emperor several traditions regarding *mut'ah* marriages which his father had collected.

⁷⁸ *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, i, Book 2, *ā'in-i kad-khudā'ī*, 201.

⁷⁹ *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* ii, 391.

Badauni himself was sent for, and confirmed that authority could be found to support Akbar's view in the Mālikī school. Akbar was very pleased at this: he suspended the orthodox Qāzī Ya'qūb and appointed a Qāzī from the Mālikī school in his place, who promptly gave a decree that *mut'ah* marriages were legal. Badauni identified this dispute as the significant break with what he saw as the proper orthodoxies of the past: it was from this day that real differences of opinion emerged, not resolved until 1579 when Akbar gained for himself the formal power to arbitrate on controversial matters of law and doctrine.⁸⁰ Here, then, the issue of the legality of his own marriages was important enough to push Akbar into an open break with the Sunni clerical leaders at court; it represented a major point of vulnerability in his drive to present himself as a unique exemplar of male virtue.

Akbar also sought to regulate the extra-marital pleasures of his servants: to curb and control sexual activity not channelled into the controls of marriage and used to fructify a man's home with progeny, with sons who would worship God, but rather than allowed to flow freely as mere unrestrained lust. Given the extraordinary range of sexual opportunities available to any courtier of means, this was a task of some proportions. Thus, as Badauni recounted, Akbar sought to regulate and record the sexual pleasures of his servants rather than attempt any kind of prohibition. The numerous prostitutes of the imperial capital were compelled to live outside the city in a special quarter. To ensure proper control, a *muhāfiz* or warden, a *dārogha* and a *mushraf* or inspector were appointed, to whom men had to make application if they wanted to patronise the women or take them home.⁸¹ However, many imperial servants evaded the regulations by applying under assumed names, so that just as the keeper was trying to bring order to one scene of debauchery, another group of aristocratic pleasure-seekers would push past him. So the emperor took to interviewing prostitutes privately to ask about their clients, as a consequence of which a number of important courtiers were caught and punished. Amongst them, Badauni asserted, was Raja Bir Bal, a disciple of the new religion, and so virtuous in it, that he kept mainly to the company of his own daughters. The raja was on his estate when he heard about this, and was about to turn resign himself to an ascetic's life when news of the emperor's forgiveness reached him.⁸²

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 207–10.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 302.

⁸² *ibid.*, 303.

Man's inner moral perfectibility extended to the male body in other ways too. Badauni suggested that new meanings came to be attached to semen. He described how Akbar introduced new norms in ceremonial ablution, abandoning the usual Islamic convention that emission of semen produced a state of impurity requiring major ablution. His reasoning was that 'the effusion of sperm is the best part of man', *khulāsa insān nutaf mazi ast*, since semen was the origin of all that was good and pure. It would be more fitting, he argued, if men were to perform the ablution before having connection.⁸³ On this view, semen represented the origin of all that was good in the world, and the distillation of an intrinsic male bodily purity. If Badauni was right, these shifts in meaning may have reflected both *akhlāqī* belief in elements of divine essence in all men, and Ayurvedic understandings of semen as a bodily reservoir of male virtue and vitality, whose retention could endow a man with extraordinary health and power.⁸⁴ This, then, was not only an attractive and socially inclusive model for elite male virtue: it again generated an independent authority for social practices previously subject to orthodox supervision. Badauni alleged that some imperial servants at least followed suit. Abu'l Fazl's brother Shaikh Faizi, he said, used to write his commentaries on the Qu'ran when he was in the very height of lust and intoxication.⁸⁵ The same impulse may have been reflected in new regulations that Badauni recorded about circumcision, now to be made a matter for individual mature decision once a boy had reached the age of twelve.⁸⁶

Other regulations related to body hair. As Obeyesekere reminds us, hair was an important personal signifier in South Asia, of particular significance in the Hindu setting in relation to renunciation and the bodily concentration of sexual power.⁸⁷ Islamic tradition usually emphasised the importance of a beard to a pious Muslim. The Prophet stated that the moustache should be cut, but the beard flow free, and took meticulous care of his beard, saying that grooming it increased

⁸³ *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, ii, 305.

⁸⁴ For more modern explorations of these significances of semen in the Indian setting, see G.M. Carstairs, *The Twice-Born: A Study of a Community of High Caste Hindus*, London 1957; James W. Edwards, 'Semen anxiety in South Asian Cultures' in *Medical Anthropology*, Summer 1983; Joseph Alter, *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1992.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, iii, 300.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, ii, 376.

⁸⁷ G. Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1981, 33–8.

vivacity and intelligence and eliminated phlegm.⁸⁸ In the early modern north Indian context, the wearing of a beard could express multiple significances. Most familiarly, of course, unkempt hair expressed ascetic withdrawal from the world. Facial hair was closely associated with warriorship. North Indian folk and literary celebrations of battle very often depict warriors chewing or twirling their moustaches as a sign of martial rage.⁸⁹ Persian influence further complicated the situation, since the Safavid court had developed much shorter beards, such that the removal of the beard became associated with authority and power. The nineteenth century chronicler Abdul Sharar described how nobles at the Lucknow court shortened and finally shaved their beards with the spread of Persian influence from Delhi, giving rise to many new styles.⁹⁰

Akbar made well publicised moves in relation to body hair. As we have seen, Abu'l Fazl described how he cut his hair after the spiritual experience of May 1578. A number of contemporaries attributed Akbar's interest in styles of hair and shaving to his Hindu sympathies. Badauni was scathing about the imperial servants who became *murīd* or disciples, shortening their hair and removing their beards in imitation of the emperor, and gaining promotion in the imperial service as a consequence.⁹¹ Badauni blamed the Hindu women of the Akbar's harem, who had turned his mind against the eating of beef and garlic and onions, and 'the friendship of people with beards', *mahabbat bā rīshdār*.⁹² In his memoirs dictated as part of Abu'l Fazl's search for materials for the new imperial history, Akbar's steward Bayazid Bayat recalled Akbar's public jesting with one of his officers just returned from Punjab, who explained that although he had not yet had his hair cut in the approved fashion, he was actually wearing it after the local Hindu fashion in Punjab.⁹³ In all contemporary illustrations, the emperor was always portrayed with facial hair on his upper lip only. The illustrations of both of the earlier and the later editions of the *Akbar-Nāma* represent many courtiers in the same way, in contrast to

⁸⁸ Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 34.

⁸⁹ See, for example, William Irvine, 'Jangnamah of Farrukhsiyar and Jahandar Shah' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1900, 46.

⁹⁰ Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*. Tr. E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain, Oxford University Press 1994, 190.

⁹¹ *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, ii, 404.

⁹² *ibid.*, ii, 303.

⁹³ H. Beveridge 'Memoirs of Bāyazīd (Bajazet) Bīyāt', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, LXVII, pt 1, 1898, 312.

beardless youths, and clerics, military men and artisans, who were often shown with full beards.

There may also have been here a connection here with the new significances surrounding semen as a distillation of male virtue. Evidence here is difficult to come by, since Abu'l Fazl does not offer his usual direct and reverential account. Here, what Badauni offers us may have been something like the local gossip amongst courtiers or in the bazaar as to what Akbar was doing and what it meant. According to Badauni, some of those who supported Akbar in his preference for shaving sought to invert the traditional association between masculinity and facial hair, emphasising that far from representing an absence of masculine qualities, shaving actually intensified them. When shaving had become a common practice and mark of special devotion to the emperor, Badauni described how certain unsavoury people suggested that a further argument for shaving was that the beard drew its sustenance from the testicles, proved by the fact that eunuchs were unable to grow beards.⁹⁴ This idea that the beard drew its nourishment from semen was quite a common one, and unsurprising given the association between the beard and masculine power. The Delhi scholar and intellectual Anand Ram Mukhlis recorded this connection in his collection of idiomatic phrases *Mirat-ul Istilah*, the 'Mirror of Idioms' completed in 1745: 'the beard is watered by the testicles'.⁹⁵ Badauni may here have been hinting at bazaar gossip that linked the court fashion for shaving to a more worldly concern to promote virility. This is certainly the link that Qureshi makes in his critique of the 'irrationality' of Akbar's belief that beards weakened virility by drawing sustenance away from the testicles.⁹⁶ On this view, the beard drew its nourishment from semen, and as the source of male virtue, semen was better conserved in the body. Thus Badauni may have been right in his sense that Hindu influences worked powerfully in the close personal context of the harem: at least at the level of the perceptions that Badauni reported, Akbar's deference towards Brahmanical forms extended beyond questions of vegetarianism and calculated displays of restraint in hunting, to include these intimate constructions of bodily virtue and power.

⁹⁴ *Muntakhab al-Tawārikh*, ii, 303.

⁹⁵ Tasneem Ahmad tr, *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Medieval India, Mirat-ul-Istilah* Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1993, 234.

⁹⁶ Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *Akbar: the Architect of the Mughal Empire*, Delhi: IAD Press, 1978, 163.

Akbar also promulgated regulations to ensure that women should conform to these ideals of marriage. On the one hand, as we have seen above, he projected marriage as a spiritual union of equals. On the other, a woman's role within marriage was an ideal of womanly modesty, deference and obedience to her husband. Here, of course, there was not too great a distance to travel between *akhlāqī* norms and those of many segments of respectable north Indian society. Badauni recorded that any young woman found in the bazaars and streets not properly veiled, or wives who behaved badly and quarrelled with their husbands were banished to the prostitutes' quarter.⁹⁷ Sexual activity for women should be strictly for the purposes of creation, such that older women should no longer wish for a husband.⁹⁸ Abu'l Fazl also explained that Akbar disapproved of older women taking young husbands, since it was against all modesty: Badauni recalled that husbands were enjoined not to lie with wives more than twelve years older than they were.⁹⁹

Akbar also made very public efforts to restrain and punish male homosexual love amongst prominent nobles of the empire. Here again, it may be possible to see these constructions of elite male bodily virtue and power employed to identify the court and the imperial service more firmly with the indigenous heterosexual idiom of north India, against the degenerate practices of outsiders. Various kinds of homosexual love were, of course, a familiar part of north Indian courtly society. The ties between military servants and their personal slaves and eunuchs often included strong sexual elements.¹⁰⁰ Beautiful youths feature in contemporary love poetry as familiarly as women, whilst conduct manuals warn of the perils of employing handsome young cup-bearers at drinking parties: one's guests were likely to end up enjoying more than the wine.¹⁰¹ Sufi transports of love for everything beautiful made by the Creator could extend to sexual love, as Badauni implied in his account of the religious teacher Shaikh Muhammad-i Kambu, known as 'the lover' for his uninhibited expressions.¹⁰² Badauni himself wrote

⁹⁷ *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* ii, 391.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, ii, 356.

⁹⁹ *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, i, Book 2, *ā'in-i kad-khudā'ī*, 201; *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* ii, 391.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, the early seventeenth century Mughal military commander Mirza Nathan's account of his affection for the eunuch Khwaja Mina. His eunuch Sa'adat Khan was also his 'boon companion' and trusted military commander. See M.I. Borah (ed. and tr.), *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, Gauhati, 1936, 228.

¹⁰¹ See Hidayat Husain, 'The Mirza Nama (The Book of the Perfect Gentleman), of Mirza Kamran', in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1913.

¹⁰² *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, 8.

in transcendent, almost mystical terms of his love for one Mazharī, on whose account he had gone missing from the court for many months while his friends told the emperor he was absent through illness.¹⁰³ These varieties of love do not seem to have precluded love for women: love between men here did not generate anything like a fixed or self-conscious 'homosexual' identity such as emerged, for example, in eighteenth century Europe.¹⁰⁴

At the same time, many contemporary accounts point to a sense of moral ambiguity in attachments of this kind. Again, some of these recalled Timurid themes. In his own memoirs, the emperor Timur recalled that he had been at the age of 14 attached to a handsome youth who showed him much affection. But then an evil companion from Transoxiana, masquerading as a student, took a liking to the youth, talking to him in an obscene way and indicating that the relationship was a sexual one. 'I was quite nettled at these words, and resolved never to allow such impropriety of conduct, either in myself or in others'.¹⁰⁵ In his account of his life, the emperor Babur recalled that as a teenager he had been crazed with love for a beautiful youth, roaming the hills and lanes in his distraction, but with no sense that this ever became a sexual relationship.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, he made his disapproval of sexual relationships with young boys clear. Sultan Muhammad Mirza, late fifteenth century ruler of Samarkhand never missed his prayers, but was addicted to wine and debauchery and kept many young boys as catamites. 'During this time this shameful vice was so widespread that there was no-one at all who did not keep catamites. To keep them was considered a virtue, and not to keep them a fault'.¹⁰⁷

What is particularly interesting in this context, then, is the emphasis that Abu'l Fazl placed on Akbar's early and enduring hostility to homosexual attachments. An early conflict took place during the regency of Bairam Khan, and concerned the imperial high servant

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, ii, 296–8.

¹⁰⁴ See Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, Longman, London 1981.

¹⁰⁵ Major Charles Stewart (ed.) *The Malfuzat Timury or Autobiographical Memoirs of the Mogul Emperor Timur*, Oriental Translation Committee, London 1830, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Wheeler M. Thackston ed., *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996, 113.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 60. For a general discussion of these tensions, see Stephen O Murray and Will Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature*, New York: New York University Press 1997.

Shah Quli Khan Mahram, who had Lucknow and adjoining territories under him. Shah Quli Khan had bestowed his affections on a boy talented in dancing, named Qabul Khan. But Akbar disapproved of this conduct in his servants and forbade it, because while such love could in principle be pure, yet there were dangers in it, of which sensible men were only too well aware.¹⁰⁸

Less easily solved was the attachment of Ali Quli Khan Zaman, one of the group of powerful Uzbek military commanders who aided Humayun and then Akbar during the struggles of the 1550s with the Afghan forces of the Sur dynasty.¹⁰⁹ In 1558, the Khan fell in love with Shaham Beg, the beautiful son of a camel driver, who had been a page of Humayun's and was a member of Akbar's special bodyguard. Shaham Beg had early established himself as the favourite of the son of one of Akbar's favourite courtiers. The pair shamelessly enjoyed their mutual affection, following 'the filthy manners of Transoxiana', *khabā'is mā warā'u'n-nahr*. This was a deviant form of attachment, Abu'l Fazl emphasised: it was 'neither burning nor melting, neither love nor friendship'.¹¹⁰ The Khan in turn conceived a passion for the youth and succeeded in seducing him. Without respect for the glory of royalty, the two even engaged in monstrous distortions of imperial ritual: the Khan used to bow down before Shaham Beg and call him his emperor, and perform the *kornish* or royal salutation.¹¹¹ Despite Akbar's remonstrations, the Khan persisted in his attachment, at which Akbar was prepared to risk military confrontation. Eventually, he put the boy away from him, and made amends by joining the imperial armies in chastising the Afghans at Jaunpur.¹¹²

Another imperial servant, Jalal Khan Qurchi incurred Akbar's anger in 1566 in the same way. When Akbar heard that he had formed an immoderate affection for a beautiful youth, he expressed his displeasure and tried to separate them. Jalal Khan tried to flee with the

¹⁰⁸ *Akbar-Nāma*, ii, 79. Shah Quli Khan, formerly a retainer of Akbar's regent Bairam Khan, acquired his title of *mahram*, 'one who has access to the harem', after Akbar had favoured him with admission to his women's apartments. After this visit, he informed Akbar that he had had himself castrated, so that he might continue to enjoy this special access. Ziyaud-din A. Desai, (ed. and trans), *The Dhakhirat ul-Khawānīn of Shaikh Farid Bhakkari*, Delhi 1993, vol. 1, p. 132.

¹⁰⁹ See Blochmann's biographical notes in *A'in* i, 319–20.

¹¹⁰ *Akbar-Nāma*, ii, 83

¹¹¹ *Akbar-Nāma*, ii, 68.

¹¹² This episode is described in very similar terms in other contemporary accounts: see *Muntakhab al-Tawārikh* ii, 21, and Brajendra Nath De and Bainsi Prasad (eds), *The Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad, Delhi 1992, ii, 225.

youth, but Akbar had him seized and brought to court, where he was confined under the public staircase, so that he would be trodden on by the feet of everyone entering it.¹¹³ There was a similar occurrence in the following year with Mozaffar Khan, originally Bairam Khan's *diwan*, but who had risen under Akbar to become his own trusted minister. It came to Akbar's attention that Mozaffar Khan had developed an attachment to a smooth-faced youth Qutb Khan, such that he had lost his judgement. To protect Mozaffar Khan from himself, Akbar arranged that the boy should be taken away and given into the care of keepers.¹¹⁴

As Richard Folz has observed, there was something of a Mughal stereotype associating pederasty with Uzbek social practice, and with the region north and south of the Oxus river referred to in Persian and Arabic literature as Turan or *mā warā'u'n-nahr*, 'that which is beyond the river' or Transoxiana.¹¹⁵ As we saw above, Babur referred to the seducer of young boys from Transoxiana. In his accounts of the homosexual attachments of imperial servants, Badauni uses exactly the same phrase as Abu'l Fazl, referring to 'the filthy manners of Transoxiana', *ba rang khabā'is mā warā'u'n-nahr*.¹¹⁶ In his history of India completed in the mid 1590s, the imperial servant Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad also referred to homosexual attachments as 'in the wicked manner of Transoxiana'.¹¹⁷ Central Asia seems to have had similar associations for the emperor Jahangir, who teased the pious Samarkhandi traveller Mutribi by asking him to judge the respective attractions of two beautiful slave boys, one dark and the other fair.¹¹⁸ These associations were part of a wider and older Timurid stereotype of Uzbeks as good military men but lawless, violent and tyrannical in their own domains, Timur himself commenting on their cruelties and oppressions as he 'made clean the land of Transoxiana from the weeds and the briars of the Uzbeks'.¹¹⁹

At one level, then, Abu'l Fazl was appealing to a familiar stereotype with his accounts of Akbar's hostility to sexual attachments between

¹¹³ *Akbar-Nāma*, ii, 271.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, 186.

¹¹⁵ Richard C. Folz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*, 43.

¹¹⁶ *Muntakhab al-Tawārikh*, ii, 21.

¹¹⁷ Brajendra Nath Dē and Bains Prasad (eds), *The Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad*, Delhi 1992, ii, 226.

¹¹⁸ Richard C. Folz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*, 113.

¹¹⁹ W. Davy (ed), *Institutes of Timur*, 86, Persian and English text. For these stereotypes see also Richard C. Folz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*, 40–1.

men. There was clearly also a political dimension to this. With their decentralised steppe traditions of clan politics and entrenched hold on key provinces in eastern UP, Bihar and Malwa, the young Akbar's Uzbek allies did not readily settle down within an ordered imperial kingdom. There were tensions also between the Uzbeks as Sunni Muslims and the Shia Persian nobility in the imperial service. In 1565 a wider Uzbek revolt emerged against the young Akbar's attempts to consolidate his authority, in which Ali Quli Khan Zaman played a leading role. Searching for external allies, the Uzbeks invited Akbar's half brother and governor of Kabul, Mirza Muhammad Hakim, to invade India. Mirza Muhammad Hakim advanced from Kabul into the Punjab and besieged Lahore, and the Uzbek rebels formally proclaimed him emperor of Hindusthan, even having his name read in the Friday prayers in the great mosque at Jaunpur.¹²⁰ Akbar's forces had crushed the rebels by the middle of 1567, but such a serious threat to Akbar's authority, and the broader Uzbek reluctance to appreciate the glory of an emperor in the Persian imperial tradition left their mark in Abu'l Fazl's account. Recounting the sexual tastes of Ali Quli Khan Zaman in such detail was at once a means of emphasising his moral weakness and emphasising its origins in the disordered Uzbek culture of Transoxiana. What is most interesting here is Abu'l Fazl's particular emphasis on the Khan's debasement of the *kornish*, the imperial salutation itself. Incapable of appreciating the true majesty of imperial power, the Khan could only turn it to the perverted ends of corrupt sexual pleasure.

Although these are clear enough pointers to a strategy of repression, there are nevertheless difficulties of interpretation. In particular, the episodes Abu'l Fazl recounts here took place when Akbar was in his late teens and early twenties. It might seem improbable that he should so early have developed such a clear hostility to what was a familiar feature of the social landscape, and that his attitude here can be seen as part of the drive for moral and sexual regulation that he developed as a mature ruler. For a number of reasons, however, it seems possible to argue that this was actually so. Akbar was no helpless minor during Bairam Khan's regency: in the culture of which he was a part, a man's teenage years could indeed produce consistent and purposive decisions. The Uzbek challenge to Akbar's power also occurred soon after his accession, making the association between

¹²⁰ John Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 18.

Uzbek turbulence and the alien sexual depravity of Transoxiana a useful political strategy. The early efforts at repression Abu'l Fazl describes do actually anticipate the later efforts at regulation in very striking ways: in their concern with a particular conception of inner moral purity, with the limitation of sexual pleasure to procreative acts, with the promotion of an ideal of heterosexual marriage. Finally, Abu'l Fazl's account represents, of course, a retrospective gloss *par excellence*, constructed with Akbar's ongoing direction and approval.

What we have in these episodes, then, may be an early and emerging sense of appropriate forms of sexual behaviour for Mughal servants, which was given greater focus and coherence as Abu'l Fazl recorded them in the light of later campaigns. Clearly, homosexual love did not fit with the model of self-controlled masculinity, of inner self-examination and control of the passions held out to imperial servants. Sexual pleasure for Akbar was legitimate within the higher moral framework of marriage, and that too only with women who were fertile: where homes could be made splendid by progeny, the fountain of mankind made to flow on, and social cohesion promoted. Sexual pleasure between men could have no such virtuous end. Friendship between men was legitimate: the friendship of a wise counsellor, of men whose families were joined by marriage, of brothers in arms on the battlefield. But sexual pleasure between men was neither: it was 'neither consuming nor melting, neither love nor friendship'. It blurred the proper boundaries between emotions and generated forms of desire and pleasure which sapped male moral strength at its most sensitive point. It could derive only from disordered worlds outside north India, where men tolerated base and bestial forms of sexual expression, and where the path to male virtue was closed.

V. Conclusions

This essay has focussed on the manipulation of bodily and gender identity, presented through official histories, as an important and neglected part of Mughal imperial strategy under Akbar. It raises many further questions which constraints of space make it difficult to discuss here. In particular, we need to look at the complex ways in which imperial servants themselves actually negotiated these codes. The Mughal efforts described here to project an ideal of honourable manliness as the monopoly of the imperial service was an extremely ambitious strategy. Its success was inevitably problematic and contested, and while we get some sense of that contest from Badauni,

his information represents only a starting point.¹²¹ It is also important to look at the way in which these norms changed over the course of the seventeenth century. While at first remarkably effective in creating a distinctive ethos for an elite imperial service, there is much evidence to suggest that Akbar's model gradually weakened over the course of the seventeenth century, as more divergent norms emerged. Challenges to early Mughal norms emerged in the encounter with other forms of normative military masculinity, that were current among the Maratha, Sikh and Afghan warbands who were drawn into the north Indian military labour market. Challenges also came from the self-conscious cultivation of luxury and pleasure in the Mughal court under the emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, and the elaboration of much more complex codes for courtly forms of masculinity: man as sophisticated gentleman connoisseur, refined in literary and poetic sensibility, elegant in person and fastidious in dress.¹²² Thus Aurangzeb's sexual puritanism and his dislike of fashionable affection amongst men of the court may have been in some senses an attempt to return to the culture of Akbar's court. On the question of male virtue, at least, Akbar and Aurangzeb may have more than the common picture might suggest.¹²³

Nevertheless, it does seem significant for a range of issues that normative masculinity should feature so strongly in early Mughal efforts to construct an elite imperial service. For Mughal historians, these strategies may yield new insights both into the early cohesion of that service, and the sense of strain and detachment that John Richards and others detect in the experience of imperial servants from the later seventeenth century.¹²⁴ To develop our understanding of these dimensions of Mughal social history further, we need to look at what it has meant to be a man across a range of Indian contexts in the early modern period, to see whether there are parallels to the normative constructs discussed here, which sought to generate political authority and to enhance social honour from 'natural' aspects of masculine identity and meanings imputed to the male body.

¹²¹ For an example of this kind of negotiation, see R. O'Hanlon, 'Issues of Masculinity in north Indian History: the Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad' in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 4, 1, 1997.

¹²² These emphases emerge very clearly in the genre of Persian 'conduct books' that emerged from the mid-seventeenth century. See, for example, Hidayat Husain, 'The Mirza Nama', and Aziz Ahmad, 'The British Museum Mirzanama and the seventeenth century Mirza in India' in *Iran* 1975. For an analysis of later seventeenth century developments, see R. O'Hanlon, 'Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India' in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 42, 1, 1999.

¹²³ I am grateful to Chris Bayly for this suggestion.

¹²⁴ John Richards, 'Norms of Comportment', 286–9.