

A Survey of Education System in India during Mughal period (1526-1707 AD)

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Abstract

Education is one of the most important social institutions. It is the requirement of and right of every human being born on earth. In the favor of the Human race, it has been given due importance by the society in all the times. Education is the single tool attributed to the development of the humans to the current heights. Its importance can be derived from the fact that in the modern era, it has not been left to the society to arrange for it, rather, the national Government makes planning and policies and fund the education of the masses. It has been seen as a tool to build the future citizens of nation and to secure a direction of growth of the country.

India has been rich in its traditions of knowledge and education. The nation has seen the development of a whole gamut of intellectuals and a plethora of scriptures, manuscripts, and other printed material. The knowledge gained by Indian seers of yore was unparalleled in the world. It included subjects of philosophical and religious emphasis as well as Mathematics, Languages, Astrology, and Sciences. It saw the first Universities of the world and remained a center of visitor's attraction for education and other purposes.

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Introduction

The established system of education went through the tides of the time when it was invaded by the kings and princes of other countries. One of these invasions, by Mughals, resulted in the establishment of the Mughal Kingdom in India. As can be understood, the majority of Mughal (foreign) Rulers, except Akbar, were almost indifferent about the educational fabric of India. Rather, they were more into establishing the systems prevalent in their traditions. The present paper is aimed at looking at the educational structure and set up at the time of Prominent Mughal Rulers in India which remain in force for the period 1526-1707 AD. The historical literature has been surveyed and extracts taken from the manuscripts in regards to the prominent Mughal era in India.

The history of India has been, perhaps, of the most dynamic nature. The country had always been a land of curiosity to the outsiders; full of business opportunities and a learning hub with storehouses of knowledge on every discipline.

The vast and varied landscape of the country comprises of as diverse geographies as a desert on one hand to the place of highest rainfall and from thousands mile long seashore to the highest mountains in the world. The land is irrigated by many rivers and rivulets with different variety of soils. The agriculture in the Country grows almost all kinds of crops possible on the earth. Some of these crops were rare to the external world. These special crops constituted mainly the spices, especially, the black pepper which was also called 'Black Gold' and was also the currency of exchange during the middle ages. The opportunity of doing business with India and to seek knowledge attracted thousands of visitors to India. It was the richest country in the world with imports and exports with many other countries in existence at that time.

Apart from attracting business opportunities, the prosperity of India attracted ambitious Kings and Princes from other regions of the world who attached to win over and Rule India. These attacks caused continuous changes in the geographical boundaries of India. In the series of in numerous attacks, the one that established a foreign Rule, incomprehension, in India, was the invasion of Mughals.

The Mughal Empire in India began to set by the attack of Babur on India in 1526 AD when he defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the first battle of Panipat. Babur was followed by Humayun, Akbar, Jehangir, Shahjehan, and Aurangzeb and the kingdom flourished till the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Mughal Rulers after this were weak and were more into living an ostentatious and luxurious life and had no strong intent of even defending their boundaries, rest aside, extending them. This

lead to the gradual decay of the Mughal Empire in India which was also paralleled by the setting of British Rule in the Country. Thus, in order to study any effect of Mughal rule in India, it is best to study the period of 1526 to 1707 BC. The present study takes to study the effect of the Mughal Rule on the existing education in India prior to that. In the same vein, the present study seeks to peep into the effect of Mughal Rule on Indian Education which was one of the most important aspects of social life in India.

Islamic Education during prominent Mughal era in India

Prior to the setting of the Mughal Empire in India or of *the Ghulam* dynasty, the Indian Education system was iconic to the world. Initially, there was the tradition of 'Guru Shishya Parampara' wherein, the learner used to stay at the house of the Teacher, away from his home, and would learn whatever he was capable of and the Guru was an expert in. During the changes of time, the system was gradually replaced (though not in entirety) with the establishment of Universities. There were and still are *Gurukuls* in the form of organized and Institutionalized knowledge houses and working for imparting education in their own ways. The *Gurukuls* in their original forms do not exist anymore in present-day India. However, a part of that form is still alive in the organized forms wherein the learners still stay away from home, in the hostels, but there is now no 'one' Guru who will run the entire institution. Rather, apart from being compulsorily residential, modern-day *Gurukuls* are almost formal schools.

Ongoing through the available literature and archives about education in India during the Mughal era, it is seen that there was no separate 'system' or formal Department of education during the Mughal period in India. However, two clear streams are visible as education agencies, the traditional Hindu education, which was in existence before the Mughals, and the Islamic system of education, which was brought in by the Mughals. The Islamic education for the masses was arranged through two recognized Institutions, viz., *Maktabas* and *Madarsas*. Evidences are available to establish that local Muslims used to send their children to *Maktabas* and *Madarasa*, whereas, the rich people used to arrange separate Teachers for the education of their children.

Maktaba is an Arabic word and its literal translation is Elementary School. In the *Maktab*, a Sheikh would impart 'education' to the young learners in the way Indian *Gurukuls* used to do. The learners sit on the ground in front of the Sheikh and the latter taught the former. The curriculum set was basic study of the languages, including reading, writing and learning Grammar, and memorization of Qur'an. In

Maktabs, *Maulavis* were appointed for providing education. The starting of education to the child was done with the word ‘Bismillah’. There was a set ritual for the start of education. The ritual of introducing the child to the education was performed on attaining the age of 4 years, 4 months, and 4 days [1]. The toddlers were to start writing on wooden boards (*Takhti*). They used to learn the alphabet and practice writing them. The script of the alphabets was Persian and the language Urdu was the main subject [2]. The Grammar of the Persian language was taught by way of memorization. It was mandatory for the students to learn Qur’an by way of memorization. Following this (the learning of Qur’an) the students were to study the poetic creations of *Bostan*, *Firdousi*, *Sheikh Saadi*, and others [3]. Apart from these, the learning in Maktabs used to focus on the teaching of manners in daily life; letter writing, application writing, and basic Mathematics. The teachers were not paid salaries but they used to be awarded by *Emirs* and the Government.

The Madarsas were meant for imparting higher education. There were many different subjects on offer and teachers to teach them. Those students who had completed their education in Maktabs were admitted in Madarsas. To run the Madarsas, there were managing Committees. The pass-outs (Alumni) of the Madarsas were given high positions in the Madarsas. This was also an encouragement for learners to come to Madarsas. The teachers in Madarsas were arranged by the Government. At times, qualified teachers were also sometimes called from outside. The courses in Madarsas would run for 10-12 years. The syllabus in Madarsas was divided into two groups- religious and materialistic (non-spiritual). The main subjects of the concern of materialistic (non-religious) studies were Literature, Arabic Grammar, Logic, Philosophy, Sciences, History, Geography, Mathematics, Astrology, Law, medicine, Agriculture, etc. [4]. In the religious arena, Qur’an and Islamic Laws were the focus of the study. Libraries were set up with the Madarsas. The head of the Library was called ‘*Nizam*’.

Several major initiatives were taken by Mughal emperor Akbar in the education during his reign. He changed the syllabus of Madarsas in order to provide similar education to Hindus and Muslims. He found it not good for his kingdom to arrange for only Islamic education for Hindus. Therefore, in order to provide education to Hindus, he established such Madarsas wherein education of Hindu religion, philosophy and literature were imparted along with education of Persian language [5]. In turn, Hindus started learning Persian in order to get a job in the Government. In this connection, Raja Todar Mal is a notable name. Emperor Akbar wanted to change the curriculum as per the need and practical usage of the society [6]. In the Mughal era, Akbar did the most for the cause of education in general.

Education of law was also imparted in Madarsas. Islamic law was based on the teachings of the Qur'an and rituals/traditions [7]. Medical Science was based on *Unani* System. Arabic and Persian languages were in dominant position in Madarsas. The teachers and students used to debate on philosophical issues. The education of music was also given in Madarsas. There were some specialized Institutions wholly dedicated to Music only, in big cities. The tradition of education in both *Maktabas* and Madarsas was oral in the sense that teachers used to deliver a lecture to the students but at the same time, the students in Madarasa were encouraged to read the books. Teachers also used to monitor the personality development of the students. The passing of students to the next higher stage was possible only on completion of the contemporary tasks. It was also provisioned that students of higher classes used to teach the students of lower classes. This was also possible because the system of assessment ensured that no students passed to higher class without completing lower class learning. By doing so, it was automatically ensured that a student passing out from a particular class was having knowledge of that class. This was also in the favour of the teachers as they could relax when senior teachers were teaching the younger ones. Also, this saved their energy to utilize it fully in the discussion with the older students, for deeper discussions, thereby, ensuring optimal use of the teachers to maximum benefits.

To encourage the high achievers, such students were felicitated with awards. *Sanad* and *Tamga* were two main prizes to recognize the high achievements of the students [8]. The students coming out of the Madarsas were placed in high administrative offices. These students, selected on high posts, were honored by tying the turban called *Amaama* [9]. It was also ensured that students remain disciplined. The traits expected from the students were disciplined, behave, and politeness. Students were also punished for indiscipline and/or indulging in non-social practices [10]. There was no written procedure for imparting punishment to the students for maintaining discipline. It was at the discretion of the teachers to decide on ways to punish the students for unwanted behavior. Lashing with sticks or whip was very common as also was asking students for holding ears through the legs [11].

There was no established formal structure of conducting examinations in that era. It was up to the teachers to establish the achievements and knowledge of the students. The students were promoted based upon the recommendations of the teachers directly dealing with the students. During those days, no. of students coming to seek education was not very big. It was easy for the teachers to establish the levels of achievements by the students through discussions, debates, etc. as the no.

of students was not big. The Hindu students, in those times, were given the titles like *Upadhyay*, *Mahopadhyay*, *Mahamahopadhyay*, *Sarvbhaum*, etc. on completion of their education. There were no equivalent degrees for Muslim education, but, they were decorated with the titles like *Fazil*, *Aalim*, and *Kabil*. The title *Fazil* was given to the students achieving specialization in Philosophy and logic, the ones achieving specialization in religious studies were titled *Aalim*, and *Kabil* degree was given to the students who would achieve specialization in literary studies.

We find that there were no special provisions for the education of women during that period. Girls could only go to the Maktab attached to the Mosque in the area. In the Maktab, girl students were taught basic reading and writing. According to the Islamic social structure, women could not go to the Maktab and Madarsas with the men [12]. *Agra*, *Fatehpur Sikri*, *Delhi*, *Gujrat*, *Kashmir*, *Lahore*, *Sialkot*, *Jaunpur*, *Ajmer*, *Multan*, *Lucknow*, *Patna*, *Bhagalpur*, *Bijapur*, *Hyderabad*, and *Ahmedabad* were main centers for Islamic education.

Efforts were put in to open Institutions for imparting education to the women during the Mughal Period. Royal and elite families used to arrange for the education of their women at home by hiring teachers who could teach at home. Mughal Kings were especially full of efforts for arranging for the education of their daughters. They were personally involved in arranging for the education and would arrange the learned and knowledgeable teachers for their daughters. Many names of the learned women during the Mughal Period can be cited such as *Gulbadan Begam*, *Gulrukh Begum*, *Salima Sultana*, *Jaan Begam*, *Noorjehan*, *Mumtaz Mahal*, *Sati Unnesa*, *Jehanaara*, *Zebunnisha*. Similar was the situation with the Hindu Women of the time.

Hindus Education in Mughal Era

Ongoing through the status of the education of Hindus during that period, we find that the Islamic Education system could not influence the Hindus much. The main reason for it was the existing strong social base of Hindus. The Hindu Education system kept functioning as it was doing previous to Mughal Era. The education of the Hindu population was taking place through routine practice in 'Pathshaalas' and 'Vidyapeeth'. The system at villages remained undisturbed at large. However, due to Political influence and activities, the Hindu traditional education in cities suffered to some extent. Even during those uncertain times, Hindus could maintain their high-class literature. Some saints and intellectuals kept raising voices for Hindu education at times during Mughal Rule.

By studying the Hindu Education system, it becomes evident that during the

Mughal period, the Hindu Education system was just the same as it used to be in the past. Though the Buddhist education had died and was replaced by the Brahmanical education. The students were given the education of *Vedas, Purans, Smiriti, Upnishads*, and Philosophy by the Gurus in their Ashrams. The students used to serve their Gurus by keeping themselves in discipline, though it was not that tough by then [13]. The subjects of studies included Grammar, Astrology, poems, philosophies like *Nyay Darshan, Vedant, and Patanjali* [14]. During this period evolved Hindi and other regional languages. *Pali* and *Prakrit* Languages developed into Hindi.

Main centers of Hindu Education during Mughal Era

The main centers of Hindu traditional education were *Benaras, Mathura, Prayag, Ayodhya, Nadiya, Mithila, and Srinagar (J&K)*. *Benaras* has been the most important center of Hindu education. Bernier has compared *Benaras* with the *Athens*, the capital of Unan [15]. Learners from all parts of India used to visit *Benaras* for specialized and general education in many disciplines. There were many schools for higher education. The teachers were mostly the Brahmans who used to devote their entire lives to deep studies in *Vedas, Purans*, and other religious and philosophical disciplines. Sanskrit was the general language of instruction in the institutions. During the invasions of Afghans and Turks, the learners from *Benaras* were forced to move to other places of India due to their non liberal ruling. In such circumstances, it was natural that *Benaras* lost the sacredness and levels of learning as it used to be. But, after the arrival of the Mughals and especially during the Rule of Akbar, the situation at *Benaras* improved and it slowly regained its lost stature.

Summing up

We see that the education during the Mughal period was flourishing due to the efforts of Government, efforts of institutions, and individual aspirations. All the Mughal emperors during the period tried to push forth education in the society. Apart from the Rulers, Ulema, wealthy Muslims, Sufis and members of the traditional learned families also advocated and backed Muslim education. Their collective and isolated efforts resulted in the desired advancement of Muslim education.

However, it (Islamic education) remained confined to the cities where political influence was most prominent. It could not extend to the rural areas where Hindu systems of traditional education remained undeterred. This is also concluded that apart from well-off families, there were no proper arrangements of education of women, especially for higher education. The Mughal period showed apathy towards the Hindu education to a large extent. It (the Hindu's education) was, at least, not at par with the previously attained heights. In old times, Hindu education was aptly

backed by the Rulers of the country which was not the case, in true spirits, when India was being 'ruled' by the Mughals. Barring the emperor Akbar, other Mughal Rulers showed only indifference towards traditional Hindu Education.

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