

Part One

**Proceedings of the
Indian History
Congress**

**68th Session
Delhi 2007**



**INDIAN HISTORY CONGRESS
DELHI, 2008**

THE ORGANIZATION OF EDUCATION IN MUGHAL INDIA

Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi

There is no doubt that the organization of education in Mughal India was on markedly different lines than the one created slowly and with a very tight purse, created by the British in India in the nineteenth century, patterned after European institutions. The fact that its education system was different does not necessarily mean that it was purposeless and ineffective.

As to purpose, one may begin with a quotation from Abu'l Fazl, Akbar's famous scholarly advisor. In the '*â'ðn-i âmuzish* (regulations regarding instructions) in the *Â'ðn-i Akbarî* Abul Fazl lays out the rules, curriculum and system of education to be followed in the schools:

In every country, but especially in Hindustan, boys are kept for years at school, where they learn the consonants and vowels. A great portion of the life of the students is wasted by making them read many books. His Majesty orders that every schoolboy should first learn to write the letters of the Alphabet, and also learn to trace their several forms. He ought to learn the shape and the name of each letter, which may be done in two days, when the boy should proceed to write the joined letters. They may be practiced for a week, after which the boy should learn some prose and poetry by heart, and then commit to memory some verse in the praise of God, or moral sentences, each written separately. Care is to be taken that he learns to understand everything himself; but the teacher may assist him a little. He then ought for some time to do daily practice in writing a hemistich or verse. (This way he) will soon acquire a current hand. The teacher ought especially to look after five things: knowledge of the letters, meaning of words, the hemistich, and the formal lesson. If this method of teaching be adopted, a boy will learn in a month, or even in a day, what it took others years to understand, so much so that people will get astonished. Every boy ought to read books on morals (*akhlâq*), arithmetic (*hisâb*), the accountancy (*siyâq*), agriculture (*falâhat*), mensuration (*masâhat*), geometry (*handasah*), astronomy (*nujûm*), physiognomy (*ramal*), household matters (*tadbîr-i manzil*), the rules of the government (*siyâsat-i madan*), medicine (*tibb*), logic (*mantiq*), physical sciences ('*ilm-i tabi'i*), sciences, and spirituell sciences ('*ilm-i ilâhi*), as well as history (*târîkh*), all of which may be gradually acquired. In studying Sanskrit, students ought to learn the *byâkaran* (grammar), *Niyâi*, *Bedânta* (Vedanta) and *Patânjal* (Yoga). No one should be allowed to neglect those things which the present time requires....¹

This description of the mode of teaching in the schools (*madrasas*) at least makes it clear that under Akbar (a) education was sought to be brought under state purview; (b) emphasis was on a method to impart comprehension rather than mere learning by the system of rote; (c) the thrust was on the topics other than religious sciences with almost all the known branches of sciences being emphasized; and (d) the teaching of the non-Muslim wards and students were also taken care of.

Badauni also asserts this point when he laments:

Reading of Arabic and its learning was looked upon as crime and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tafsîr* (exegesis of the Quran), *hadith*, and their study was considered bad and disapproved of. *Nujum* (astronomy), *hikmat* (philosophy), *târîkh* (history) and *afsâna* (novels) were cultivated and thought necessary.²

Emphasising the importance given in this scheme to the non-religious curriculum and the fact that it was to be taught both to the Muslims and non-Muslims, Badauni says:

In this year (995AH / 1586AD) it was ordered that all sections (*har qaum*) should give up Arabic sciences ('*ulûm-i 'arabi'yah*) and apart from the '*ulûm-i gharîbah* (external sciences), like *nujûm* (astronomy), *hisâb* (mathematics), *tibb* (medicine), and *falsafah* (philosophy) should study nothing else. The date of this was found as *kasad-i fazl*.³

Some schools seem to have been constructed under imperial sponsorship since the reign of Humayun. Maham Anaga, the foster mother of Akbar opened a *madrasa* known as *Madrasa-i Begum* which was also known as *Khairul Manazil*.⁴ It was a residential institution with students residing in the rooms of this double-storeyed structure. The classes were held in the hall. At Agra, according to Badauni, there was another great college being run in the hospice of the learned scholar Shah Mir.⁵ There are numerous references to a *madrasa* or a school meant for the royal princes and princesses being run inside the Imperial palace at Fathpur Sikri. Monserrate describes it when he mentions that Akbar appointed him to for 'education and training' of the royal wards.⁶

Further impetus to the *madrasas* was given during the reign of Jahangir. On his accession, the edicts of his first regnal year mention that in case of the death of a person who died without an heir, the proceeds from his property would be utilized in good works like repair of mosques, wells, sarais and *madrasas*.⁷

Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlavi, the noted scholar of Jahangir's reign was educated in the '*Madrasa-i Dehli*' which according to him was about two miles from his house.⁸

During the reign of Shāhjahān we get reference to two schools which were founded by him, one at Agra and the other at Delhi, in which the teachers were directly appointed by the emperor.⁹ During his reign Lahore, Ahmadabad, Burhanpur, Jaunpur, Sirhind, Thanesar and Ambala emerged as important seats of learning and attracted a number of students from distant places.¹⁰

During the reign of Aurangzeb an attempt was made to introduce free education, but unfortunately the attempt was not successful. However as an experiment Aurangzeb ordered the opening of a *madrasa* to cater to the Bohras of Gujarat. Teachers were appointed and a system of monthly examination was introduced. It was further ordained that the result of the students would be communicated to the emperor for his personal assessment.¹¹

A large number of *maktabs*, and *madrasas* were also attached to the mosques and hospices where the scholars would assemble to impart education. Presumably these institutions were exclusively for the Muslim students.

The *maktabs* or schools, however, appear to have catered to both the Muslim and Hindu students. Miyan Shaikh 'Abdullah Badauni, a Hindu convert to Islam, as a young student prior to his conversion attended classes and studied such Persian texts as *Bustān-i Sā'dō*. Badauni mentions that one day when Miyan's teacher was teaching him a lesson from *Bustān* and came to a couplet in praise of the Prophet, for whom the word 'Chosen One' was used, he enquired from his teacher "What is the meaning of this couplet? Explain it to me in *Hindi*". The teacher enquired "What business have you (as a Hindu) with this *hikāyat* (story)?"¹²

During the reign of Shahjahan, Balkrishan Brahman 'as per the tradition of the family' was sent to study in the *maktab* of 'Abdul Majid, a teacher 'who had no equal in the city of Hisar'.¹³ It was he who taught him how to write.¹⁴ Under his guidance Balkrishan gained knowledge of Persian and expertise in its idioms and metaphors.¹⁵ Balkrishan claims to have achieved competence in composing *inshā* at the early stages while he was still at the *maktab*. He boasts that the children at the *madrasa* and the street, due to his expertise, nicknamed him 'munshi'. He learned his arithmetic and *siyāq* (accountancy) in the office of one of the 'āmil and *hākim* (official) of Hisar.¹⁶ He further brushed his knowledge of *inshā* as the *shāgird* (student) of Shaikh Jalal Hisari with whom he remained for nine years.¹⁷

Shan Sarang Surat Singh, the author of *Tazkira-i Pōr Hassō Tçli*, a petty bureaucrat during the reign of Shahjahan, was similarly educated

and trained at Lahore by Abdul Karim, a scholar of that city. Abdul Karim taught Surat Singh, making him study works of poets like Yusufi, Jami, Anwari, and Khaqani besides teaching him books like *Tuhfat ul Ahrâr Subhat ul Abrâr*, *Akhlâq-i Nâsiri* and various other *maktûbât* (epistological collections) and works in prose and poetry.¹⁸

In Banaras, Thatta, and Multan there were schools where Brahmans taught and both Hindus and Muslims received education.¹⁹ During the eighteenth century we have Munshi Meghraj who corrected the drafts of Tahmas Beg Khan, when the later finished his diary in 1782.²⁰

These *madrasas* and *maktabs* were generally day schools having two sessions with a recess in between.²¹

For the Hindus, Banaras was an important seat of learning. According to Bernier it could be considered as 'the general school of the *Gentiles* (Hindus)'. He in fact calls it as the 'Athens of India'. He does say however that Banaras 'contains no colleges or regular classes, as in our universities'. Eminent teachers took their classes with 'four disciples, others six or seven, and most eminent may have twelve twelve or fifteen'. These students would sit at the feet of their tutors 'in different parts of the town in private houses' and merchants' gardens in the suburb of the town for 'ten or twelve years', during which time 'the work of instruction proceeds but slowly'.²²

He further says that this pursuit of knowledge 'entertains no hope that honours or emoluments' may be awarded to them at the end. The scholars' dietary wants were taken care of in the shape of '*kichery*, a mingled mess of vegetables' supplied by rich merchants.²³

Tavernier on the other hand describes a college established by Raja Jai Singh at Banaras near the Temple of Visvesvara. This college, he says, was meant for the education of the young men 'of good families'. The medium of instruction was Sanskrit:

I saw the children of the Prince, who were being educated there by several Brahmans, who taught them to read and write in a language which is reserved to the priests of the idols (i.e. Sanskrit) and very different from that spoken by the people.²⁴

He also adds:

...throwing my eyes upwards, I perceived a double gallery which ran all round it (the building), and in the lower the two Princes were seated, accompanied by many young nobles and numerous Brahmans, who were making different figures like those of mathematics, on the ground with chalk.²⁵

Tavernier also mentions that the college teachers had in their possession

two globes, presented to them by the Dutch. When they enquired where France was 'I pointed out the position of France upon them'.²⁶

Although there were not many separate colleges exclusively dealing with the medical sciences, as in Aleppo, Egypt or Iran, their existence is testified in India as well. Monserrate pointedly mentions 'a very famous school of medicine' at Sirhind, 'from which doctors are sent out all over the empire'.²⁷ Abdul Baqi Nahawandi mentions the *madrasa* of Hakim Shams and Hakim Mu'in at Thatta, where they also gave lectures on medicine.²⁸ Similarly, Mir Abu Turab Gujarati, a physician and contemporary of Akbar, had his own *maktab*, where he imparted education.²⁹ Abdul Hamid Lahori mentions a certain Hakim Mir Muhammad Hashim who used to impart instruction in his own school at Ahmadabad.³⁰ Hakim Alimuddin Wazir Khan is said to have built a *madrasa* at his native town Chiniot in the Punjab.³¹

One may assume that in these schools run by the *tabibs*, the curriculum included a study of texts on *tibb*. This impression is strengthened by Abul Fazl's statement in *Ain-i Akbari*, that Akbar had directed the inclusion of *tibb* with the other sciences in the school curriculum.³² The well-known *Nizami* syllabus (*Dars-i Nizamiya*) included, besides other texts, the following well-known texts on *tibb*: *Sharh-i Asbab*, *Mu'jaz al-Qanun*, *Qanun* of Abu 'Ali Sina, *al-Nafisi* and *Hidayah-i Sa'ida*.³³

Another form in which education in *tibb* may have been imparted was through *dawakhanas* (dispensaries) and *sharbatkhanas* (syrup houses / distilleries), often run through state munificence.³⁴

The most important centres of medical education during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, were located in Iran, from where many physicians in India were recruited.³⁵ A sizeable number of physicians of the Mughal period are said to have attained their knowledge from various academies in Lahijan (Gilan), Mashhad, Isfahan and Shiraz.³⁶ Mir Muhammad Hashim, better known as Hakim Hashim, who later became tutor to Prince Aurangzeb and also opened his own *madrasa* at Ahmadabad, remained in the holy cities for twelve years to acquire knowledge. In India he was a student of Hakim Ali Gilani.³⁷ Similarly, the famous Gilani brothers attained their education in Iran before migrating to India.

There exists evidence suggesting that sometimes Indian scholars too went to institutions in Iran for training and education in *tibb*. One such person was Ahmad Thattavi who went to Iran from Sindh and studied in Shiraz under the guidance of Mulla Kamaluddin Husain and Mulla Mirza Jan, two noted physicians of Shiraz; on completion of his

studies he came back to India.³⁸ Muhammad Akbar Arzani, a noted physician under Aurangzeb and a native of Delhi, also went to Iran for further studies in *tibb*.³⁹

A perusal of the Persian sources shows that medical education was tutor-oriented. Those desirous to learn would go to a reputed physician and get the education from him.⁴⁰ Thus Hakim Ali Gilani acquired his knowledge in the company of Hakimul Mulk Shamsuddin Gilani and Shah Fathullah Shirazi.⁴¹

Darush-shifa or *shifakhana* (hospitals) were also run by the government, which employed physicians for the purpose. According to the *Bahar-i Ajam*, these places were buildings (*makan*) established by the rulers and nobles for the treatment of the poor and needy (*ghuraba wa masakin*).⁴²

In his twelve edicts of the first regnal year, Jahangir ordained the establishment of hospitals in all the great cities of the empire, where physicians were to be appointed for healing the sick. The expenses of these hospitals were to be met from the *khalisa sharifa*.⁴³

From a reference to a *madrasa* being attached to a *shifakhana*, it appears that these hospitals sometimes served as medical colleges of sorts.⁴⁴ During the reign of Shahjahan, a government hospital was constructed at Delhi near Chowri Bazar, 'for the treatment of the travellers and the students (*talib-i 'ilman*) who cured the sick'.⁴⁵ A reference to a 'school of medicine' at Sirhind has already been given, from where, according to Fr Monserrate, 'doctors are sent out all over the empire'. Monserrate was probably referring to a medical college. Another government hospital that flourished was the *darush-shifa* of Ahmadabad, where Shahjahan appointed Hakim Mir Muhammad Hashim as the head.⁴⁶ This hospital was meant for treating the poor⁴⁷ and Yunani as well as Ayurvedic (*tibb-i hindi*) physicians and surgeons were appointed to treat patients. We hear of two more government hospitals, the *darush-shifa* at Aurangabad and the *darush-shifa* at Surat.⁴⁸

Apart from government hospitals, hospitals could also be established by nobles. During Jahangir's reign; Saif Khan built a hospital complex at Jeetalpur comprising a mosque, a *madrasa* and a *shifakhana* which treated the poor.⁴⁹ During the same reign, Hakim Alimuddin Wazir Khan constructed a *madrasa* and a *darush-shifa* along with other buildings at his native town of Chiniot in the Punjab, and dedicated those to the residents of that town.⁵⁰ A certain Hakim Muhammad Rafi opened a *hawaij kadah* (clinic) for the treatment of the poor.⁵¹

Thus we see that the Mughal scholarship and system of education was basically not confined only to theology or theological themes. A number of 'rational' subjects like medicine, zoology, botany, chemistry, physics, geography and gemmology were studied and taught. Secondly, it would be incorrect to say that the Mughal schools and colleges were heavily oriented towards religious education or training. Thirdly, education under the Mughals sought to cater to all the sections of the society. There were of course, *madrasas* and *maktabs* which served the elite sections of the society ranging from the princes and nobles to the 'middle-classes' like the bureaucrats and the scribes. There were also *madrasas* and *chatsals* (*pathshalas*) catering to the needs of the general civic population including the petty merchants. Apart from them, there were specialized institutes which imparted scientific knowledge like medicine. The Mughal education system, needless to say, was thus taking into account both the Hindus and the Muslims and subjects which dealt with matters far beyond spiritual and sacred.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Abul Fazl, *'Ain-i Akbari*, ed. H. Blochmann, Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1867-77, vol. I, p. 143.
2. Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab ut Tawârîkh*, ed., Ahmad Ali, Kabiruddin Ahmad and L.W.Nassau Lee, Bib.Ind., Calcutta, 1864-69, vol. II, pp.306-7.
3. *Ibid.*, II, p. 363.
4. *Ibid.*, II, p.60.
5. *Ibid.*, III, p. 119.
6. Father Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Moserrate, S.J., On his Journey to the Court of Akbar*, tr. J.S. Hoyland, annot. S.N.Banerjee, London, 1922, p.52.
7. *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, ed. Saiyid Ahmad, Aligarh, 1864, p.4.
8. Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith, *Akhbâr ul Akhyâr*, Delhi, 1332 AH, p. 296.
9. Muhammad Sadiq, *Tabaqât-i Shâhjâni*, MS. *Farsia Akhbar* University Collection, Research Library, CAS in History, AMU, Aligarh, MSS no.79, ff. 294, 295, 320, 324; See also Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, Bombay, 1959, p. 29.
10. Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, tr. With Introdn & notes by W.Irvine, Calcutta, (reprint), 1966-67, II, p. 424.
11. Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mirat-i Ahmâdi*, Baroda, 1928, vol.I, p.378.
12. Badauni, *op.cit.*, III, pp. 54-55.
13. *Letters of Jalâl Hisâri and Bâlkrishan Brahman*, BM. MS. Add. 16859 (Rotograph in the Research Library, CAS in History, AMU, Aligarh), f. 97 (a)
14. *Ibid.*, ff.65 (a) - 67 (b).
15. *Ibid.*, ff. 97 (a) - (b).
16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, ff. 97 (b) – 98 (a).
18. Surat Singh, *Tazkira-i Põr Hassu Tçli*, MS., Research Library, Department of History, AMU, Aligarh, f. 120 (a).
19. For their description (imparting 'vile learning') and ultimate destruction by Aurangzeb, see Saqi Musta'id Khan, *Ma'asir-i 'Alamgõrõ*, Calcutta, 1870-73, p.81.
20. Tahmas Beg Khan, *Tahmås Nâma*, abridged & tr. P. Setu Madhavá Rao, Bombay, 1967, p.153.
21. *Akhbâr ul Akhyâr*, op.cit., p. 296
22. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire AD 1656-1668*, ed. A. Constable & revised by V. A. Smith, Delhi, 1983, p. 334.
23. *Ibid.*, p.335.
24. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels In India* tr. V. Ball, second edition, ed. William Crooke, vol.II, New Delhi, 1977, II, pp. 182 - 83
25. *Ibid.* p. 183
26. *Ibid.*
27. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate; S.J (on his Journey to the Court of Akbar)*, translated by J.S. Hoyland, annotated by S.N. Banerjee, Calcutta, 1922, p. 103.
28. Abdul Baqi Nahawandi, *Ma'asir-i Rahimi*, edited by Hidayat Husain, Vol.,II, Calcutta, 1931, p. 274.
29. Shah Nawaz Khan, *Ma'asir-ul Umara*, edited by Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Vol.,III, Calcutta, 1888-90, pp. 280-81.
30. Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Padshahnama*, edited by Kabiruddin Ahmad and Abdur Rahman, I, ii, Calcutta, 1867, p. 345.
31. *Ma'asirul Umara*, III, p. 936.
32. Abul Fazl, *Ain-iAkbari*, translated and edited by Blochman, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1927, p. 279.
33. Cf. Abdul Jalil, 'The Evolution and Development of Graeco-Arab Medical Education', *Studies in History of-Medicine*, Vol. 11, No. 3, September 1978; see also Hakim Kausar Chandpuri, *Atibba-i 'Ahad-i Mugháliya*, Karachi, 1960.
34. *Ibid.* For state aid to dispensaries, see, for example, Maulana Abul Hasan, *Muraqq'at-i Hasan*, MS., Rampur Raza Library (transcript of MS. in Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University), pp. 330-31.
35. See for example *Ma'asir-i Rahimi*, III, p. 46. Hakim Jibrail, a famous physician, who later joined the service of Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan while teaching at a *madrasa* known as *Darul Irshad* at Ardebil, heard people say that 'Iran was the *Maktab Khana* of Hindustan'.
36. See *Ma'asir-i Rahimi*, III, pp. 44, 46, 51, 52, 745-55, etc. For example Hakim Fathullah Shirazi attained his knowledge at the *madrasa* of Mi Ghiyasuddin Shirazi, the reknowned hakim of Shiraz, and Khwaja Jamal uddin Mahmud and Maulana Kamaluddin at Shiraz. *Ma'asir-ul Umara*, pp. 100-01. For other such examples, see Muhammad Sadiq, *Tabaqat Shahjahani*, MS., Department of History Library, Aligarh Muslim University, p. 466. Saqi Must'ad Khan, *Ma'asir-i Alamgiri*, III, Calcutta, 1870-7, pp. 17, 50, 45-46.
37. Lahori, *Padshahnama*, I, ii, pp. 345-46.
38. *Ma'asir-ul Umara*, III, p. 263.

39. *Yadgar-i Bahaduri*, BM. MS. OR. 1652, f. 96, as cited in *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Charles Rieu, Vol. II, 1881 p.479.
40. For details on medical education, see Abdul Jalil, 'Évolution and Development of Graeco-Arab Medical Education'; and A. H. Israili, 'Education of Unani Medicine during Mughal period', *SIHM*, Vol. IV, No. 3, September, 1980.
41. Badauni, *Muntakhab-ut Tawarikh*, edited by Molvi Ahmad Ali, Vol.III, Calcutta, 1869, p. 166. For other such examples see Khwaja Nizamudin Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, edited by B. De, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1931, p. 483; *Ma'asir-i Rahimi*, III, pp. 51-52; Lahori, *Padshahnama*, I, p. 346.
42. Munshi Tek Chand 'Bahar', *Bahar-i Ajam*, 1739-40, litho. Nawal Kishore, Lucknow, 1336/1916, Vol. II, p. 166.
43. *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, I, p. 4.
44. *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, edited by Nawab Ali, Vol. I, Baroda, 1972-78 I, p. 209.
45. *Sairu'l Manazil*, p. 8. This *Darush Shifa* is probably the same which is referred to by Gopal Rai Surdaj (*Durul Ulum*, f. 45(b)).
46. Lahori, *Padshahnama*, I, ii, p. 345.
47. *Mirat-i Ahmadi* (supplement), pp. 186-87.
48. For the hospital at Surat, see *Ruqqat-i Alamgiri*, Nizami Press, Kanpur, 1273 AH, Letter No. 125. See also *Surat Documents*, ff. 174(b), 175(a).
49. *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, I, p. 209.
50. *Ma'asirul Umara*, II, p. 936.
51. *Muraqq'at-i Hasan*, Abul Hasan, MS., Riza Library, Rampur (Microfilm in Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University).