



INTERFAITH EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS: ACADEMIC CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS

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Abstract:

Interfaith educational relations have been a fundamental aspect of knowledge exchange and cultural interaction throughout history. These academic connections between Muslims and non-Muslims have played a pivotal role in shaping civilizations, fostering mutual respect, and promoting intellectual growth. By engaging in scholarly dialogues, research collaborations, and institutional partnerships, different religious communities have developed a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives, thereby reducing prejudices and misconceptions. The history of interfaith academic cooperation can be traced back to the Islamic Golden Age, where Muslim scholars translated and preserved the works of Greek, Persian, and Indian thinkers. Institutions such as the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) in Baghdad served as centers of learning where scholars from diverse backgrounds, including Christians, Jews, and Muslims, worked together in pursuit of knowledge. These interactions significantly contributed to advancements in philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and mathematics, laying the foundation for the European Renaissance. In the contemporary world, interfaith educational initiatives continue to serve as powerful tools for building peaceful coexistence and fostering social harmony. Universities and academic institutions across the globe have established interfaith dialogue programs, exchange opportunities, and collaborative research projects aimed at addressing global challenges. Organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other interfaith networks actively promote academic cooperation among different religious communities. Despite these positive developments, interfaith academic relations face various challenges, including religious biases, socio-political conflicts, and institutional restrictions. Some societies exhibit resistance to interfaith engagement due to deep-seated historical grievances or ideological differences. However, by encouraging open-minded discussions, inclusive curricula, and shared academic platforms, these barriers can be mitigated, leading to a more interconnected and understanding global society. This article explores the role of interfaith educational relations in bridging gaps between Muslims and non-Muslims. It highlights the historical evolution of academic cooperation, contemporary initiatives, and the challenges that hinder progress in this field. By analyzing the benefits and potential strategies for strengthening these academic connections, this study aims to provide valuable insights into how education can serve as a catalyst for interfaith understanding, tolerance, and cooperation. Ultimately, fostering interfaith academic relations is crucial in today's interconnected world, where conflicts often arise from misunderstandings and lack of knowledge about other cultures and religions. Through academic engagement and mutual learning, societies can cultivate respect, reduce prejudices, and work towards a more peaceful and inclusive future.

Keywords: Interfaith Educational, Connections, Muslims and Non-Muslims, Bayt al-Hikmah, Established

Pre-Mughal Education

Before the Mughal era, education in India was not a state responsibility. Both Muslims and non-Muslims pursued learning through existing institutions. Muslim rulers,



however, established madrasas and maktabas following the orthodox educational system influenced by Al-Ghazali. This system largely excluded non-Muslims. Bhanwar Lal Dwivedi notes, "The education of the majority of the population was not regarded as a responsibility of the state. A few schools and colleges were opened for the public, based primarily on the Quran and Arabic literature... The maktabas and madrasas were meant for Muslim religious education, and Hindus were largely neglected. As a result, most of the Hindu population remained illiterate"¹.

Despite this exclusion, individual efforts kept Hindu education alive. Ibn Battuta reported the existence of several schools for both boys and girls in Hanaur. With the arrival of Muslim scholars, efforts were made to understand local religious and secular traditions. Al-Biruni, one such scholar, documented Indian culture in his works. He observed that Hindus believed in a single divine presence but worshiped various deities through images. He also noted their reluctance to share Sanskrit texts with foreigners due to cultural reservations². Overall, the educational policies of early Muslim rulers in India focused on religious instruction rather than secular sciences. While some individuals, such as the Kayasthas under Sikandar Lodi, learned Persian for administrative purposes, broader educational development remained limited³.

Educational Objectives

Professor A. L. Shrivastava highlighted that education in India was primarily controlled by religious scholars, leading to the neglect of secular subjects like history, philosophy, and Sanskrit literature. This allowed religious leaders to shape education according to orthodox beliefs. The primary focus of education was character development. In schools, children used wooden tablets (takhtis) to learn alphabets and arithmetic, with teachers emphasizing handwriting and mathematical skills. Physical activities, like Kabaddi, were also common. The core objectives of Muslim education included spreading knowledge, promoting Islamic teachings, instilling moral values, reinforcing social customs, and strengthening religious beliefs.

During the Muslim period, education developed gradually. Maktabas (primary schools) and madrasas (higher institutions) were established and financially supported through land grants. These institutions often operated within or near mosques. Muslim rulers valued education and respected both Muslim and non-Muslim teachers, granting them prestigious positions in their courts. Learning Arabic and Persian was mandatory for state employees, leading many non-Muslims to study these languages under Muslim scholars. Although education remained largely religious, vocational training was also provided in fields such as military science, painting, architecture, and weapon-making. These practical skills were imparted by experts in their respective fields⁴.

The Mughal emperors showed a keen interest in historical documentation, as seen in works like Baburnama, Akbarnama, and Jahangirnama. This encouraged scholars from different communities to focus on historical writings, leading to a significant expansion of literature in this field. Additionally, the Mughal era witnessed the flourishing of the Urdu

¹ Dwivedi, Evolution of Educational Thought in India, Northern Book Centre, 1994, p. 202

² Al-Biruni, Kitab al-Hind, National Academy, 1958, p. 67

³ Dwivedi, Evolution of Educational Thought in India, 1994, p. 208

⁴ Singh & Nath, History of Indian Education System, S. B. Nangia, 2007, p. 48-49



language, with both Muslim and non-Muslim writers and poets contributing to its development under royal patronage.

Structure of the Educational System

The education of a Muslim child traditionally began with the "Bismillah" ceremony at the age of four years, four months, and four days. This ceremony, unique to India, bore resemblance to the Upanayan ceremony of Hindus during the Vedic period and the Pabbajja ceremony observed by Buddhists. During this initiation, the child, adorned in new attire, was introduced to their teacher, who commenced the lesson with the recitation of verses from the Quran ⁵.

Primary Education: Maktabas

The primary stage of education was provided in maktabas, small schools usually attached to mosques. The instructors, known as Moulvis, played a crucial role in teaching the Arabic alphabet, Quranic recitation, and essential religious practices, including prayer (namaz) and the call to prayer (azaan). Additionally, students were trained in arithmetic, drafting, and letter writing. Persian and Arabic were the primary mediums of instruction.

Higher Education: Madrasas

Upon completing maktab education, students could pursue advanced studies in madrasas, which were often state-funded and patronized by rulers. These institutions provided extensive education in Islamic sciences, Persian grammar, literature, logic, philosophy, law, astrology, history, geography, agriculture, and medicine. Some madrasas also offered Sanskrit education, allowing Hindu students to participate ⁶.

During the Mughal period, specialized educational centers were established to train scholars in particular disciplines. The Mughal administration emphasized literacy and numeracy, and teachers played a vital role in guiding students. Monitors assisted in maintaining discipline, fostering a structured learning environment ⁷.

Teacher-Student Relationship and Discipline

Madrasas encouraged a strong bond between teachers and students. Prominent rulers, such as Aurangzeb, demonstrated reverence for their teachers; for instance, he warmly welcomed his mentor, Mullah Shah Saleh, to his court. Although teachers earned modest salaries, they commanded great respect in society. Discipline was enforced through corporal punishment, though meritorious students and distinguished teachers often received rewards from royal courts ⁸.

Women's Education

While education for women was generally discouraged, royal women had access to learning through appointed tutors. They were instructed in literature, poetry, and Islamic studies, ensuring that educated women within elite circles could contribute to intellectual and cultural life ⁹.

Impact on Society

The educational system of medieval India significantly influenced both Muslim and Hindu cultures. Many highly skilled individuals from diverse religious backgrounds attained

⁵ Singh & Nath, *History of Indian Education System*, Arya Publishing House, 2018, p. 53

⁶ Qureshi, *Islamic Education in India*, Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 112

⁷ Habib, *The Mughal Education System*, Routledge, 2019, p. 65

⁸ Alam, *Persian Education in Mughal India*, Harvard University Press, 2017, p. 89

⁹ Nath, *Women and Learning in Medieval India*, Penguin Books, 2021, p. 42



prestigious positions within the state administration. The evolution of the Urdu language in the post-Aurangzeb era further reflected the linguistic and cultural impact of this educational structure¹⁰.

This structured and well-defined system fostered intellectual growth, producing experts in various fields and shaping the cultural and administrative landscape of medieval India.

Initiatives of Mughal Rulers for Advancing Education

Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur (1526-1530) was not only a skilled conqueror but also a distinguished writer and poet. He authored Babur Nama in Turkish and promoted literary activities by establishing Shuhrat-a-Aam, an institution encouraging both Muslim and Hindu scholars¹¹. Given Babur's deep interest in literature, history, and arts, it is evident that his descendants received education from the prominent scholars of the era.

Humayun continued this legacy by inviting intellectuals to his court, including the physician Yousuf b. Muhammad, who authored Riaz-ul-Advia, Jamah-ul-Fawaid, and Fawaid-ul-Akhbar¹². He had a particular interest in astronomy and maintained an extensive library in his palace. Humayun also established madrasas, maktabas, and public libraries, including the conversion of Sher Mandal into a library, which was likely frequented by Hindu scholars as well¹³. Additionally, he founded a madrasa in Delhi, functioning like a university, attracting students from various regions.

Akbar's Efforts in Advancing Education

Emperor Akbar prioritized education and encouraged the teaching of logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, administration, and agriculture, establishing a secular foundation for learning. Despite being illiterate, he showed keen interest in early childhood education. Ain-i-Akbari provides a detailed account of Akbar's educational reforms, as Bhanwar Lal Dwivedi notes: "Akbar emphasized structured learning, ensuring students first mastered writing, memorization, and comprehension, enabling them to learn in a short period what previously took years"¹⁴.

Akbar was the first ruler to promote education for all communities, fostering intellectual exchanges between Muslims and non-Muslims. He invited scholars of various faiths, held theological discussions, and encouraged interfaith dialogue. His court featured nine distinguished intellectuals, known as the Navratnas, including Abul Fazl, Faizi, Birbal, and Tansen¹⁵. Akbar established numerous schools and colleges, supporting both Hindu and Muslim education while providing financial assistance and land grants to educational institutions. He also patronized literature, fostering the development of multiple Indian languages.

The Ibadat Khana became a renowned center for scholarly debates, akin to a university. His vast library, managed by Faizi, contained books from both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Akbar also allocated jagirs to sustain madrasas financially. According to Dr. P. Saran, Akbar's educational policies reflected a modern approach, promoting efficiency

¹⁰ Chakrabarty, Indian Education and Social Change, Orient Blackswan, 2022, p. 127

¹¹ Syed, Muashari we Elemi Tarikh, Sulman Academy, 1965, p. 169

¹² Sharma & Sharma, History of Education in India, Nasik, 1985, p. 64

¹³ Nasik, Dor-i-Mughalia, Aziz Publishers, 1990, pp. 314-327

¹⁴ Dwivedi, Evolution of Educational Thought in India, 2005, pp. 205-208

¹⁵ Sharma & Sharma, History of Education in India, 1985, pp. 62-63



in learning. “His emphasis on structured teaching methods saved time and ensured comprehensive education”¹⁶.

While there is no certainty about the extent of subjects taught to different communities, Akbar’s patronage significantly advanced higher education. Though Mughal educational institutions were largely private initiatives, they received state support. Aurangzeb, like his predecessors, continued funding both Muslim and non-Muslim schools. However, as Dr. P. Saran notes, Akbar lacked the systemic educational vision that later British rulers introduced. “He established institutions but did not create a widespread educational system necessary for a modern nation”¹⁷. Nevertheless, Akbar’s reforms laid the foundation for a more inclusive and intellectually diverse India.

Jahangir and Shah Jahan’s Contributions to Education

Jahangir actively promoted literature, art, and education. He established numerous maktabas and madrasas and also supported pathshalas. His memoir, *Jahangirnama*, reflects his intellectual pursuits. Notable poets in his court included Surdas, Tulsidas, and Keshavdas. Jahangir introduced a unique policy of allocating the estates of deceased nobles to madrasas, ensuring continued funding for education. He also increased teachers' allowances and continued Akbar’s tradition of constructing educational institutions¹⁸.

Shah Jahan, though primarily known for his architectural achievements, also valued education. He did not introduce new policies but reinforced existing ones by renovating old institutions and supporting educators through land grants. He established a royal madrasa near the Royal Mosque and restored Madrasa Dar-ul-Baqaa.

His son, Dara Shikoh, was a distinguished scholar fluent in Persian and Arabic, with a deep interest in Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy. He translated the Vedas and Upanishads into Persian under the title *Sirr-i-Akbar* (The Great Secret). His other works include *Safinat-ul-Auliya*, *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, and *Hasanat-ul-Arifin*. His scholarly efforts fostered interfaith dialogue and intellectual exchange¹⁹.

Aurangzeb’s Approach to Education

Aurangzeb implemented a new educational policy, replacing the previous system with reforms aimed at broadening access to education. He actively promoted learning across all communities and introduced vocational training for women for the first time in Mughal history²⁰.

During his reign, numerous madrasas were established across the empire, with stipends allocated for both teachers and students. These stipends were distributed according to academic levels—students at the elementary level (Mizan) received one anna per day, those at an intermediate level (Munshaib) received two annas, while advanced scholars studying *Sharh-e-Waqayah* were granted eight annas daily. Additionally, Aurangzeb ordered provincial diwans—many of whom were Hindu or Jain—to distribute scholarships to students of Mizan and Kashshaf²¹.

¹⁶ Saran, *The Provincial Governments of the Mughals*, Faran Academy, Lahore, 1976, pp. 405-406

¹⁷ Saran, *The Provincial Governments of the Mughals*, 1976, p. 407

¹⁸ Sharma & Sharma, *History of Education in India*, Nasik, p. 62-63

¹⁹ Salak, *Muslim Saqafit, Edarah-i-Saqafat-i-Islamia*, Lahore, 1982, p. 224; Hamid, *Muslim Philosophy, Science and Mysticism*, Sarup & Sons, New Delhi, p. 274-275

²⁰ Sharma & Sharma, *History of Education in India*, Nasik, p. 314

²¹ Dwivedi, *Evolution of Educational Thought in India*, p. 215



Aurangzeb also took measures to support education among the Bohras by appointing teachers and introducing a formal examination system, with results directly reported to him. He provided financial assistance to both state-funded and privately established educational institutions. In 1678, he allocated funds to restore schools in Gujarat, and in 1697, he granted the villages of Sohindra and Siha to Madrasa Akram-ud-Din Khan. Similarly, Madrasa Saif Khan received financial support under his rule. Two significant madrasas, Madrasa Rahimiya and Madrasa Nizamia of Faringi Mahal, were founded during his reign, leaving a lasting impact on India's educational landscape²².

Under Aurangzeb, Hindu and Muslim students often studied under the same teachers. However, for higher education, Hindus typically traveled to Banaras, as its degrees were highly esteemed. Meanwhile, Muslim scholars continued to establish madrasas independently. For instance, Qazi Rafi-ud-Din founded a madrasa in Biana, which became a notable center of learning²³.

Aurangzeb's contributions to education were significant, as he institutionalized financial support for learning and promoted religious and secular education alike. His reign saw the growth of educational institutions that played a crucial role in shaping intellectual traditions in Mughal India.

Administration of the Education Sector

During the Mughal era, education was primarily managed by religious and judicial authorities, including Qazis and Pundits. These institutions, however, lacked a structured framework for higher education for both Muslims and non-Muslims. Detailed records of educational institutions from this period are scarce. Mughal rulers valued scholarship and rewarded intellectual contributions with honors and courtly recognition. Inspired by the emperors, both Muslim and Hindu elites contributed to establishing schools and colleges. Under Akbar's rule, Hindus and Muslims received education together in the same institutions²⁴.

The Mughal education system aimed at practical training to help individuals earn a livelihood. Educational institutions were established across cities and villages, with a strong focus on Persian, Sanskrit, and Arabic, while vernacular languages received little attention. Both Hindu and Muslim institutions maintained disciplined structures. However, there were no universities or formal examination systems. Instead, students received degrees upon completing specific courses. Military training was an integral part of madrasa education for Muslims, just as Hindu students received martial training under their teachers against Muslim rulers. Education was particularly emphasized for boys, while women's education was largely neglected²⁵.

The system had several merits, including discipline, moral education, literary development, and accessibility. However, it also had significant flaws, such as an imbalanced curriculum, lack of reasoning skills, low status of teachers, gender disparities, and an absence of a university-level structure. Interestingly, financial support for education often came through non-Muslim diwans. A.L. Basham states, "Revenue management, including land

²² Mu'in-ul-Haq, *Muashari wa Elemi Tarikh*, p. 169

²³ Salak, *Muslim Saqafit*, p. 225

²⁴ Saran, *The Provincial Governments of the Mughals*, pp. 405-406

²⁵ Sharma & Sharma, *History of Education in India*, p. 64



grants for scholars and institutions, was largely handled by Hindu diwans, causing resentment among certain Muslim factions”²⁶.

Curriculum and Texts for Mughal Maktabas and Madrasas

During the Mughal era, the educational curriculum included a diverse range of subjects such as moral teachings, arithmetic, agriculture, geometry, astronomy, medicine, logic, natural sciences, and history. Hindu students primarily studied Sanskrit, Nyaya, Vedanta, and Patanjali's teachings. Several books were incorporated into the syllabus, including Talima Azizi, Inshaa Faiq, Ruqaate Alamgir, Gulistan, and Bahare Danish. Poetry was also an essential component, with works like Karima, Bustan, Yousuf Zulaikha, and Sikandara Nama being taught.

A significant transformation in the curriculum occurred during the declining Mughal period when Molvi Nizam-ud-Din introduced the Dars-e-Nizami system. This curriculum emphasized subjects like Sarf (morphology), Nahv (grammar), Mantiq (logic), Hikmat (philosophy), Fiqh (jurisprudence), Tafsir (Quranic exegesis), Hadith (Prophetic traditions), and later included Adab (literature) and Usul-e-Hadith (principles of Hadith)²⁷.

Historical records also indicate that Mughal-era education incorporated books in prose, poetry, fiction, and history. Notable prose works included Rukkat-e-Abul Fazl, Insha-i-Yusufi, and Bahr-i-Sukhan. Poetry books such as Shah Nama of Firdausi, Poems of Amir Khusro, and Dewan-Hafiz were integral to the curriculum. Fictional works like Tutiya Nama and Anwar-a-Danish were also studied. Additionally, history books such as Akbar Nama by Abul Fazl and Tarikh-e-Firoz Shahi played a crucial role in shaping students' knowledge of past events. Ethical studies included Akhlaqi Nasiri and Akhlaq-i-Jalali, which emphasized moral and philosophical teachings²⁸.

The Mughal education system, though diverse and structured, was largely focused on religious and classical studies. It significantly influenced later educational models in the Indian subcontinent, contributing to a lasting legacy of traditional learning.

Major Educational Institutions During the Mughal Era

During the Mughal period, Delhi emerged as a prominent hub for education, catering to both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Numerous madrasas, such as Madrasa Nasria, were revitalized, and new institutions were established. Hindu nobles also founded religious schools. Humayun established a madrasa for higher education in astronomy, geography, Persian and Arabic grammar, and philosophy. In 1561, Akbar's foster mother founded an educational institution in Delhi, where the renowned scholar Badauni studied. A missionary school for local Christian children also operated in Delhi.²⁹

Agra also developed as an educational center. Akbar reportedly established an institution resembling a university, where scholars from various religious backgrounds engaged in debates. Jaffar notes, "Men of learning from Arabia, Persia, and Bokhara flocked to Agra for its excellent patronage, transforming it into a great literary city with numerous schools and colleges."³⁰

²⁶ A Cultural History of India, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 261

²⁷ Dwivedi, Evolution of Educational Thought in India, p. 213

²⁸ Dwivedi, Evolution of Educational Thought in India, p. 213

²⁹ Sharma & Sharma, History of Education in India, 1996, pp. 67-68

³⁰ Jaffar, Muslim Education in India, 1972, p. 102



Jaunpur, known as Shiraz-e-Hind, gained fame for its educational institutions, with Muhammad Shah establishing twenty schools. Cities like Bihar, Fatehpur Sikri, Sindh, Lahore, Multan, Bengal, Gujarat, and Surat also had renowned institutions attracting students from diverse backgrounds.

Several madrasas gained specialization in distinct fields. Madrasa of Shah Waliullah in Delhi was known for Hadith and Tafsir studies, while Farangi Mahal in Lucknow specialized in jurisprudence (Fiqh). Sialkot's madrasa was notable for grammar studies. Shah Jahan founded a royal college near Jama Masjid in Delhi, and Jesuits established another in Agra. Kashmir was also a center of learning, and Sher Shah built a college in Narnaul.³¹

Despite efforts to promote secular sciences, the Mughal education system became rigid and lacked creativity. Hindus were often marginalized, with Sanskrit being the primary language for Hindu scholars, making accessibility difficult. However, India still produced distinguished scholars in various disciplines, including ethics, philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy. Herb and Kaplan state, "India's intellectual heritage, seen in Upanishads, Buddhism, and the decimal system, positioned it for cultural greatness."³²

Structure of the Educational System

During the Mughal era, maktabas provided primary education, while madrasas served as institutions for higher learning and specialized training. The primary aim of education was the promotion of religious teachings. Despite Emperor Akbar's efforts to introduce practical learning, the system remained largely religious. Muslim students studied Islamic sciences, while Hindu students focused on Hindu religious texts, though Islamic subjects were not mandatory for them. Akbar's minister, Abul Fazl, documented the educational framework in *Ain-i-Akbari*, highlighting subjects like Vedanta, jurisprudence, and Patanjali's teachings for Hindu students. However, disciplines such as medicine, history, geography, economics, political science, philosophy, law, and mathematics were taught to both Muslim and Hindu students. Hindu teachers were also employed in these institutions, and Mughal emperors commissioned both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars to record significant events.

By the declining phase of the Mughal rule (1707–1759), Punjab had a diverse range of educational institutions, including Quran schools, Persian schools, Gurmukhi schools, Sanskrit schools, Mahajani schools, Urdu schools, and Hindi schools³³. Bakhshish Singh Nijjar, in his work *Punjab under the Later Mughals*, provides insights into the educational institutions of this period, emphasizing their varied linguistic and religious influences³⁴.

Assessment and Certification System in the Mughal Era

During the Mughal period, students were promoted to higher educational institutions based on their competency, as judged by their teachers. There was no standardized examination system like annual or semester exams. Instead, student abilities were assessed through debates, discussions in royal courts, and participation in scholarly gatherings. Practical life experiences also played a crucial role in evaluating a student's aptitude. Those who demonstrated excellence were awarded prizes, while those unable to perform well were not recommended for further studies³⁵.

³¹ Dwivedi, *Evolution of Educational Thought in India*, 2005, p. 222

³² Herb & Kaplan, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2008, p. 797

³³ Sharma, *History of Education in India*, p. 68–69

³⁴ Mustafa Waheed, *Lahore*, 1854, p. 294–297

³⁵ Sharma, *History of Education in India*, p. 69



Unlike modern academic certifications, degrees were granted based on mastery of specific subjects. A student proficient in logic and philosophy received the title of Fazil, while those specializing in religious studies were awarded the title of Alim. Experts in literature earned the title of Qabil. Special ceremonies were held to confer these titles. The Hindu education system did not have a formal degree system, but scholars were honored with titles such as Bhishakavara for medical expertise, Kavi and Kaviray for poetry, and Vachpati for scholarly excellence. Higher titles included Pundit, Acharya, Upadhyaya, and Mahopadhyaya, the latter being reserved for distinguished scholars like Jain Hamsagani and Vidyasagar.

This system, though informal, recognized intellectual achievements and rewarded scholarly excellence through prestigious titles rather than structured examinations.

Vocational Training During the Mughal Period

Vocational education played a significant role in the Mughal era, with specialized training provided in various crafts and professions. Sultan Feroz Tughlaq transformed workshops into training institutions where prisoners learned practical skills to reintegrate into society. Similarly, Babur highlighted economic activities in his memoir, Babur Nama. Historical records also indicate that vocational education in Rajasthan was primarily conducted through family-based training.

The Mughal rulers actively promoted skill development in fields such as carpentry, blacksmithing, dyeing, tanning, sculpting, and carving. Additionally, they introduced training programs in agriculture, accountancy, public administration, and political science to strengthen governance and earn the trust of both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Women's vocational training was also encouraged, though it remained largely restricted to wealthy families. According to historian Farishta, women received instruction in dancing, music, sewing, weaving, velvet making, goldsmithing, iron-smithing, quiver-making, shoemaking, wrestling, and military arts. However, widespread illiteracy among women persisted due to social constraints such as purdah, child marriage, and restrictive traditions³⁶.

The Mughal approach to vocational education reflected a blend of practical skill development and social stratification, benefiting artisans and professionals while limiting opportunities for marginalized groups.

Education of Muslim and Non-Muslim Women During the Mughal Era

The education of women in the Mughal period was significantly influenced by social and religious customs. Muslim women, particularly those from noble families, received education in the confines of their homes or palaces due to the purdah system. While they could attend maktabas for basic literacy and arithmetic, higher education in madrasas was largely restricted. Despite these limitations, several Mughal women made remarkable contributions to literature and education. Nur Jahan, for instance, was a distinguished poet and played an influential role in governance³⁷.

Royal women were often tutored by scholars from both Muslim and Hindu backgrounds. Notable educated women included Gul Badan Begum, daughter of Babur, who authored Humayun Nama, and Zebunnisa, daughter of Aurangzeb, who was proficient in Arabic and Persian. Sultana Suleema, Mumtaz Mahal, and Jahan Ara were also well-versed

³⁶ Dwivedi, Evolution of Educational Thought in India, p. 219

³⁷ Sharma, History of Education in India, p. 71



in literature and the arts. However, common Muslim women had little access to formal education.

Similarly, among the Rajput and Hindu royal families, education was primarily available to aristocratic women. Some Hindu women excelled in arts and religious studies. Rama Bai, daughter of Maharana Kumbha, was skilled in music and Hindu scriptures, while Mira Bai was an expert in Hindu philosophy³⁸. Hindu rulers also supported painting, and many women from noble families engaged in artistic pursuits.

Education during this era remained largely limited to elite women, with minimal opportunities for common women due to social restrictions and economic disparities.

Libraries During the Mughal Period

The Mughal rulers were passionate about books and established well-maintained libraries. Humayun inherited a vast collection from his father and spent considerable time in his library, tragically passing away in an accident on its staircase. Sheikh Faizi owned a notable library with over 4,600 books, attracting both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars due to his cordial relations with Hindu intellectuals like Abul Fazl³⁹.

Libraries were not limited to the Mughal court; Rajasthan housed several private collections, including those in Jain Upasaras. Royal families maintained libraries, employing caretakers for preservation. Books were acquired through conquests and carefully stored in specially designed cupboards. Traditional books were written on palm leaves or birch bark using black ink.

Emperor Akbar maintained an extensive library divided into two sections: one within the harem and another outside. It was further categorized into secular sciences, literature, prose, and religious texts. Experts read books aloud to the Emperor, and he personally marked progress with his pen. Scholars recited classics such as Akhlaq-i-Nasiri, Kimiya-i-Saadat, Qabus Nama, Shah Nama, and works of Nizami and Khusrau. Akbar rewarded scholars with gifts and even gold for their readings⁴⁰.

Historically, ancient Indian institutions like Nalanda and Takshashila had rich libraries, later destroyed by invaders. Unfortunately, during the Mughal era, madrasas and pathshalas did not focus on rebuilding libraries, and this neglect persisted into British rule, as their policies were not aimed at fostering education among Indians⁴¹.

Persian Translations of Sanskrit Texts

The translation of Sanskrit texts into Arabic began in the 8th century under the Abbasid Caliphs at Bait-ul-Hikmat, where scholars of diverse backgrounds worked on converting Greek, Sanskrit, and Persian works into Arabic. This initiative preserved and expanded ancient knowledge, contributing to fields like mathematics and philosophy. Al-Biruni played a significant role in translating Hindu religious texts into Arabic, documented in his renowned book *Kitab fi Tahqiq ma lil-Hind*.⁴²

Following the Abbasids, Emperor Akbar encouraged the translation of Sanskrit texts into Persian. Abul Fazl records that Akbar appointed scholars to translate major works,

³⁸ Dwivedi, Evolution of Educational Thought in India, p. 219

³⁹ Dwivedi, Evolution of Educational Thought in India, p. 219

⁴⁰ Abul Fazl, The Ain-i-Akbari, p. 109

⁴¹ Gupta, Planning for Academic Excellence, 1992, p. 104

⁴² Basham, A. L. (1981). A Cultural History of India. Oxford University Press.



including Mahabharata, rendered into Persian as Razm Nama by Naquib Khan, Abdul Qadir Badauni, Faizi, and Sheikh Sultan. Abdul Qadir also translated Ramayana, while Sunghasin Battisi was translated into Nama Khird Afza.⁴³ The mathematical treatise Lilawati was translated by Sheikh Faizi under the title Ayyar-i-Danish, and Muhammad Khan of Gujarat translated astronomical texts.⁴⁴

Prince Dara Shukoh took a keen interest in Hindu religious literature, believing in the philosophical similarities between Sufism and Vedantic thought. He translated 52 Upanishads into Persian within six months (1656-7) with assistance from Hindu scholars. This work, Majma-ul-Bahrain, aimed at establishing a connection between Islamic and Hindu mystical traditions.⁴⁵ However, his religious inclinations were seen as a threat to orthodox Islamic traditions.⁴⁶

During Mughal rule, translations of Hindu scientific and philosophical texts continued. Under Muhammad Shah, Raja Jai Singh of Amber established observatories in Jaipur, Ujjain, Mathura, Banaras, and Delhi. The Hindu scholar Jagannath translated Ptolemy's Almagest into Sanskrit as Siddhantsara Kaustubha.

Significant contributions were made in medicine, with Hindu and Persian scholars collaborating on medical texts. The first music treatise translated into Persian was Lajbate Sikandar Shahi during Sikandar Lodi's reign. Other major works include Atharva Veda by Haji Ibrahim Sirhindi, Hariband by Nasrullah Mustafa, and Panchatantra by Maulana Hussain Waiz, translated as Kalilah wa Dimnah.⁴⁷

This legacy of translation fostered a cultural and intellectual exchange, preserving ancient Indian knowledge while integrating it into the broader Islamic scholarly tradition.

European Contributions to the Advancement of Indian Literature

The Jesuits established the first printing press in Goa in 1566, marking the beginning of printed literature in India. They translated the Bible into Tamil and other Dravidian languages, spreading Christian texts across the Mughal Empire. Additionally, Jesuit scholars produced Christian Puranas and developed grammars and dictionaries, benefiting both Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals.⁴⁸

Several European missionaries mastered Indian languages. German scholar Ziegenbalg and Italian missionary Beschi contributed significantly to Tamil literature. Other missionaries preserved Bengali literary traditions and facilitated the transmission of Western knowledge to India. The British, after gaining political power, introduced modern education in Bengal, leading to the establishment of Fort William College in 1800 and the Baptist Mission Press in Serampore. These institutions played a crucial role in publishing translated manuscripts, particularly in Bengali, and fostering literary growth. Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was instrumental in promoting modern Bengali literature.

Portuguese traders also influenced linguistic development in India by introducing a trading lingua franca in Indian ports. European nations that followed adopted Portuguese business terminology for commercial interactions. Portuguese scholars compiled dictionaries

⁴³ Abul Fazl, Allami (1873). The Ain-i-Akbari. Translated by H. Blochmann. Calcutta.

⁴⁴ Haq, Syed Mu'in-ul (1990). Mu'ashari we Elemi Tarikh. Edara-i-Saqafat-i-Islamia, Lahore.

⁴⁵ Bernier, Francois (1916). Travels in the Mogul Empire. Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press.

⁴⁶ Dwivedi, Bhanwar Lal (2000). Evolution of Educational Thought in India. New Delhi.

⁴⁷ Salak, Abd-ul-Majeed (1985). Muslim Saqafit. Lahore.

⁴⁸ Hunter, The Indian Empire, Its People, History and Products, Trubner & Co, 1886, pp. 343-353



of various Indian languages, while Jesuit missionaries translated Christian texts into Persian, reflecting their engagement with the Mughal court.

European missionaries played a role in shaping cultural practices, including music and arts. Jesuit schools in Goa replaced traditional Hindu and Muslim songs with Portuguese hymns and introduced European musical training. Some Goan musicians even performed at Jesuit chapels within the Mughal court. European influence extended to Mughal paintings as well. Both Akbar and Jahangir admired Christian art, commissioning copies of religious paintings such as the Crucifixion and Madonna and Child. Court artist Kesho successfully replicated these works, leading to a noticeable Western influence in Mughal artistic traditions

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Christian missionaries also contributed to architectural and sculptural traditions in India, bringing European artistic styles to Mughal-era churches and courts. Jesuit Fathers adorned churches in Agra and Lahore with Christian imagery and presented sacred paintings to Mughal emperors. Jahangir incorporated Christian iconography into court decorations, reinforcing the European artistic imprint on Indian culture.

Through printing, translation, linguistic studies, artistic contributions, and educational initiatives, Europeans played a pivotal role in shaping Indian literature and cultural exchange during the Mughal era.

Hindu Education in Orissa During the Mughal Era

During the Mughal rule, traditional educational institutions such as Chhatrasalas (village schools) and Pathshalas played a vital role in imparting education. These institutions were supported by local rulers, providing shelter and sustenance to students and teachers. Sanskrit served as the primary medium of instruction, with a focus on religious teachings, reading, writing, and basic mathematics. Teachers, known as Abadhanas or Gurus, were categorized into Bidya Guru, Diksh Guru, and Kodanda Guru. Education followed a structured approach, beginning with basic alphabets and gradually advancing to subjects like astronomy, scriptures, and philosophy.

Higher education was primarily conducted in temples, mathas (monastic centers), and royal courts. Brahmins played a crucial role in educating the children of noble families, and the villages of Orissa became centers of learning. Respect for teachers was a fundamental principle, and students often assisted them in household chores. Writing materials included palm leaves and iron pens, as paper and ink were not widely used. The major literary works studied included Jyotis Sastra, Ganita Sastra, Alankara Sastra, and others, reflecting the high educational standards of the time ⁵⁰.

The Mughal rulers largely refrained from interfering in the Hindu educational system, allowing it to function independently. However, they did not establish new institutions for Hindu education. Female education remained restricted to royal and noble families, where women were taught scriptures, music, and literature. Despite limited educational opportunities for common women, some gained prominence as scholars and writers.

Madrasas in Orissa, such as those in Khatbinshani, Cuttack, and Binjharpur, provided education to children of all communities. The curriculum included subjects like grammar, arithmetic, and religious studies, with Sanskrit and Oriya as the main languages of

⁴⁹ Basham, A Cultural History of India, Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 292-345

⁵⁰ Sharma, Development of Modern Education in India, p. 13



instruction. Practical training in commerce, fine arts, painting, and music was also part of the educational system, particularly among business families⁵¹.

Benares as a Center of Hindu Learning During the Mughal Empire

Benares was a major center of Hindu education and religious learning. Francois Bernier compared it to Athens, highlighting its significance where Brahmins engaged in teaching. Education was not systematically organized, but Brahmins provided instruction in private houses and gardens, often funded by wealthy merchants. Students studied in small groups, typically consisting of four to fifteen learners, under renowned scholars. The merchants ensured financial support, covering food and shelter for both teachers and students. Sanskrit was the primary language of instruction, as it was considered sacred, being the medium of the Vedas. Religious education was mandatory, and the Puranas were regarded as interpretations of the Vedas. Hindu scholars maintained strict control over these texts, preventing Muslims from accessing them.

Hinduism had six major philosophical schools, and physics was taught through ancient texts composed in verse. However, Hindu physicians lacked anatomical knowledge, as dissection was forbidden. European medical experts introduced anatomical studies to Indian physicians. Bernier demonstrated blood circulation to his Muslim patron by dissecting a goat, explaining the discovery of vessels by Pequet. Hindu astronomers had their own planetary calculations and could predict eclipses but lacked geographical understanding, believing the world to be flat and triangular.

Despite Sanskrit's prestige, it had become confined to temples and royal courts. The chief Brahmin of Benares received a pension from the Mughal court. Bernier observed this scholar at Delhi, seeking financial support after Aurangzeb halted his stipend. During his travels from Agra to Bengal in 1665, Bernier visited Benares and noted that Raja Jai Singh had established an educational house for Brahmins to teach Sanskrit to Hindu noble children. Hindu mysticism influenced Mughal princes like Dara Shikoh and Sultan Shuja. The chief Brahmin of Benares claimed to estimate the world's age, and both Hindu yogis and Muslim Sufis were influenced by Greek philosophy⁵².

Structure of the Educational System for Non-Muslims

During the Mughal period, various Hindu educational institutions operated under royal patronage. In early childhood, parents, particularly fathers, played the role of educators, teaching children religious philosophy, ethics, and essential life skills. This system, known as family schooling, was common among merchants who trained their sons in business practices.

Apart from family education, students also studied in the homes of respected teachers. These home-based institutions, resembling ancient ashrams, were maintained through land grants from nobles and charitable donations. Brahmin scholars provided education to Hindu princes using manuscripts, ensuring the preservation of traditional knowledge.

Jain educational institutions, called Upasaras, were another significant part of the educational landscape. Managed by Jain monks and assisted by senior students, these centers focused on religious and philosophical teachings. Jain scholars also contributed to manuscript preservation by meticulously copying and illuminating classical texts.

⁵¹ Sharma, Development of Modern Education in India, p. 15

⁵² Bernier, Travels in the Mogul Empire, Oxford University Press, 1934, pp. 338-352



Maths (monastic schools) played a crucial role in spreading knowledge, led by spiritual gurus who held cultural and intellectual influence. Examples include the Savina Khera Math in Udaipur and the Kaushik-Ram Math in Jaisalmer. Additionally, local institutions such as Pathsala, Nesal, Posal, and Chok were active in both urban and rural areas, ensuring education was widely accessible.

Curriculum of Hindu Education in Mughal India

During the Mughal era, Hindu education encompassed various disciplines, focusing on literacy, numeracy, and specialized subjects. Basic education emphasized reading, writing, and arithmetic, which were essential for students in Hindu states. Higher education included subjects such as Puranas, logic, astrology, astronomy, ethics, metaphysics, literature, grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, medicine, and veterinary science.

For the sons of rulers and nobles, mastering the Vedas, Dharmashastras, grammar, politics, and music was compulsory. Additionally, Kshatriya boys underwent rigorous military training, including horseback riding, elephant mounting, fortress raiding, and expertise in weaponry. Notably, artillery was introduced as a subject for Kshatriya youth in Rajasthan during the 17th century⁵³.

Hindu Engagement with the Persian Language

The Mughal Empire played a crucial role in promoting the Persian language. A.L. Basham notes that while the Mughals were originally Turkish speakers, they were deeply influenced by Persian culture, spreading its language and customs across India. He states,

"The Mughal may be said to have re-established Persian influence... by the enthusiasm with which they propagated all things Persian. They spread the use of Persian from the court and diplomacy to the whole range of administration... Indo-Persian poets and historians existed before, but none surpassed Faizi and Abu'l Fazl of Akbar's day. What was new was the spread not only of the Persian language but of Persian ideas, tastes, and terminology to a wide Hindu class as well as the Muslim ruling class".

Persian became the official language of administration, and many non-Muslims, particularly in the revenue and bureaucratic sectors, learned it for official correspondence. François Bernier highlights how Hindu officials played a key role in Mughal governance due to their proficiency in Persian⁵⁴. This linguistic shift led to the widespread Persianization of Indian culture, influencing literature, etiquette, and courtly traditions.

Advancements in Hindu Astronomy

Under Mughal patronage, both Muslim and Hindu astronomers made significant contributions to the field. A.L. Basham notes that the Muslim tradition of astronomical instrumentation persisted in India until the 18th century. He states,

"The astrolabe, perfected by generations of Persian and Arab craftsmen, continued to be crafted in India, particularly by the family of Isa B. Allahabad in Lahore during the reign of Emperor Jahangir (1605–1627). These instruments were later used at the observatories of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II (1686–1743) in Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi, and Mathura"⁵⁵.

Jai Singh's principal astronomer, Jagannath, incorporated both European and Islamic ideas into his research. His large masonry quadrants and dials, designed for precise measurements in the absence of telescopes, were inspired by the observatory of Ulugh Beg in

⁵³ Dwivedi, *Evolution of Educational Thought in India*, 1994, p. 214

⁵⁴ Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, 131

⁵⁵ Basham, *A Cultural History of India*, p. 158



Samarkand. Basham further describes a simple yet effective astronomical tool—a shepherd's time stick inscribed in Nagari script, found in Nepal, illustrating the continued development of indigenous astronomical techniques.

Christian Initiatives in Advancing Religious Education

During the Mughal era, education flourished in various fields. Jesuits in Agra established a church and a college where children from Christian families received education. Christian scholars and doctors were supported financially by Mughal rulers, hoping to spread Gospel teachings across Hindustan. The close association between Prince Dara Shikoh and Father Buseo exemplified this mission. However, François Bernier expressed disappointment in the slow progress of missionary efforts, noting that only one Muslim converted to Christianity in ten years. He observed that while Muslims respected the New Testament and Jesus, believing in His miracles and virgin birth, conversion remained rare ⁵⁶.

One notable missionary, Father Heinrich Roth S. J., resided in Agra from 1650 to 1660. He mastered Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy, forming connections with Mughal nobles. His expertise in Sanskrit led to educational exchanges, and in 1665, he returned to Rome, where he contributed to *China Illustrata*, including engraved Sanskrit alphabets and religious texts translated into Latin.

The Jesuits received permission from Emperor Akbar to build churches in Agra and Lahore. They also established a college where local Christians and Mughal elite children studied European languages and political concepts ⁵⁷. Their influence extended to Prince Dara Shikoh, who held Jesuit scholars in high regard. Father Francois Catrou noted that Dara maintained close ties with European scholars, particularly Father Busee, whose counsel he valued highly ⁵⁸.

Mughal Enthusiasm for Music and Art

The Mughal emperors played a significant role in promoting music and art. Tansen, a legendary musician in Akbar's court, contributed to the development of numerous ragas. Dance was also an essential aspect of Mughal culture, with renowned dancers like Anarkali flourishing under Akbar's reign. Hindu dance masters trained young girls for religious performances ⁵⁹.

Akbar's court housed a diverse group of musicians from various backgrounds, including Miyan Tansen, Baba Ramdas, Subhan Khan, and Srigyan Khan, among others. These musicians were highly esteemed and contributed to the cultural richness of the empire ⁶⁰. The Mughal emperors themselves took a keen interest in music. Babur and Humayun patronized both Hindu and Muslim musicians, recognizing the importance of musical heritage. Humayun even recruited a talented musician from Mandu after conquering the region ⁶¹.

Mughal patronage extended to painting as well. Akbar established a system where artists presented their works weekly and received rewards based on their skill and creativity. Among the prominent painters of the era were Mir Sayyid Ali, Khwaja Abd-us-Samad,

⁵⁶ Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 286, 289

⁵⁷ Adams, *Warriors of the Crescent*, Hutchinson & Co, London, 1893, p. 213

⁵⁸ Catrou, *History of the Mughal Dynasty in India*, J. M. Richardson, London, 1826, p. 202

⁵⁹ Sharma & Sharma, *History of Education in India*, p. 73

⁶⁰ Abul Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. 1, pp. 612-613

⁶¹ Nasik, *Dor-i-Mughalia*, p. 480



Basawan, and Daswant. Their paintings gained admiration not only in the Mughal Empire but also worldwide ⁶².

Jahangir, known for his deep appreciation of art, continued this legacy, fostering painters like Bichitr, Mansur, and Bishan Das ⁶³. Mughal paintings adorned literary works, with illustrated manuscripts such as Hamzanama, Razmnama, Ramayana, and Mahabharata emerging as cultural treasures. Nobles and courtiers followed the emperor's example, commissioning portraits that documented the lifestyle of both Muslim and Hindu elites ⁶⁴.

Various art forms thrived under Mughal rule, including sculpture, temple architecture, jewelry-making, and textile weaving. Traditional Indian paintings depicted musicians, dancers, and their instruments, highlighting the flourishing artistic scene. References to technical and secular education in Mahabharata indicate the prominence of skilled craftsmanship during this period ⁶⁵.

Through their patronage, the Mughal emperors created an environment where music and art flourished, leaving a lasting legacy in Indian culture.

Jahangir's Passion for Art and Connections with Non-Muslim Artists

Jahangir was an avid patron of the arts, blending Persian, European, and Indian influences to develop the distinctive Mughal painting style. Both Muslim and non-Muslim artists were part of his court, reflecting his inclusive approach to artistic development. His deep interest in painting enabled him to identify artists by merely observing their work.

Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador, once presented a European painting to Jahangir, who confidently claimed that his court artists could replicate it. When the copy was completed, Roe was astonished by its precision. Similarly, the Persian painter Kamal-ud-Din Bihzad's work was meticulously reproduced by a Hindu artist, Nahiya, at Jahangir's court, showcasing the emperor's emphasis on artistic mastery.

Jahangir also commissioned paintings to gain insight into foreign courts. He sent Khan Alam and Bushan Das to Iran to create portraits of Shah Abbas and his courtiers, which provided the Mughal emperor with visual knowledge of the Safavid court. Additionally, he used portraiture for medical purposes, such as when he had Raja Rambir's image painted while he was ill to analyze his condition.

European religious paintings intrigued Jahangir, and his court housed an extensive collection of Christian artwork brought by Jesuit missionaries. He also valued Hindu artists like Gurodhun, who painted a detailed depiction of Jahangir's court, illustrating the attire, courtly settings, and cultural life of the time. Another prominent artist, Manohar, gained high rank in the Mughal administration due to his artistic talent.

Jahangir's passion for art extended to hunting scenes and depictions of royal events. One painting from the tenth year of his reign illustrates the departure of Rana Kunwar Kiran. Another artwork, now housed in a Paris museum, captures Jahangir's meeting with the Hindu ascetic Gosain Jadrup, whom he visited multiple times for philosophical discussions. This meeting, significant in demonstrating Jahangir's engagement with Hindu religious thought, was even documented in his memoirs ⁶⁶.

⁶² Abul Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. 1, pp. 108-109

⁶³ Nasik, *Dor-i-Mughalia*, pp. 479-480

⁶⁴ Abul Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. 1, p. 107

⁶⁵ Sharma, *Development of Modern Education in India*, p. 11

⁶⁶ Nasik, *Slah-ud-Din, Dor-i-Mughalia*, P: 479-480



Hindu influence on Mughal paintings grew through the contributions of Rajput nobles at the Mughal court. Rajput rulers commissioned artworks depicting their valor and religious devotion, further integrating Hindu elements into Mughal artistic traditions. Among the most renowned painters of Jahangir's reign were Bushan Das, Kashu, Manohar, and Tulsi, who played a pivotal role in shaping Mughal visual culture ⁶⁷.

Education and Skill Development in Various Disciplines

During the Mughal era, various crafts flourished, and both Hindu and Muslim artisans received royal patronage. Embroidery, ivory work, and jewelry-making were highly esteemed, with Hindu artisans excelling in intricate designs. Despite the absence of formal technical institutions, skills were passed down through generations within families. Mughal artisans played a vital role in manufacturing war supplies, including boats, ships, and weaponry, while their architectural expertise is still evident in grand structures like the forts and palaces of Agra, Delhi, Lahore, and Fatehpur Sikri ⁶⁸.

The Mughals contributed significantly to art, architecture, and literature by blending Indian, Persian, and Central Asian influences. Their buildings, such as mosques and palaces, reflected this unique architectural synthesis. Despite Aurangzeb's efforts to impose a strictly Islamic style, Mughal constructions continued to incorporate Hindu elements.

Urdu, which originated during the Delhi Sultanate, saw further refinement under Mughal rule. The patronage of poets and scholars helped establish Urdu as a literary language. Muhammad Shah Rangila made efforts to elevate Urdu as the court language, solidifying its influence on Indian culture.

Sufism also gained prominence, influencing both Muslims and Hindus. The Chishti order, in particular, attracted followers across religious lines. Sheikh Muhibb-ullah (d. 1648) acknowledged his engagement with Hindu mysticism and encouraged his disciples to learn from Hindu yogis ⁶⁹.

The Mughals' policies of cultural and educational patronage helped create a rich, diverse artistic and intellectual environment, shaping India's artistic and literary heritage.

Education System at the Time of British Arrival

The British arrived in India as traders in the 16th century during the height of Mughal rule. As the Mughal Empire declined, British influence expanded, eventually leading to 150 years of colonial rule. The British introduced Western literature, science, and technology, and educational reforms were placed under the Board of Directors of the East India Company.

In 1834, Lord Macaulay played a key role in shaping the education system, advocating for English-medium instruction. However, these reforms primarily benefited the elite, neglecting the common people. Before British intervention, Indian education was managed by local institutions, including makhtabs (Islamic schools) and pathshalas (Hindu schools), which were widespread—reports suggest thousands existed in Bengal alone by 1835. Higher education was available through madrasas, but schools faced challenges such as inadequate buildings, limited resources, and the absence of teacher training institutions.

With the introduction of British education policies, these traditional institutions gradually declined, as colonial authorities viewed them as outdated and ineffective. Over time,

⁶⁷ Nasik, Slah-ud-Din, *Dor-i-Mughalia*, P: 479-480

⁶⁸ Sharma & Sharma, *History of Education in India*, p. 72

⁶⁹ Basham, *A Cultural History of India*, pp. 292-293



Western-style schools replaced indigenous educational structures, significantly altering India's academic landscape.

Contributions of Christian Missionaries to Education

During the early years of British rule, colonial officials showed little interest in educating the common people. In response, Christian missionaries took the initiative to establish schools and colleges in Mughal India without relying on the East India Company's support. Alongside education, they also spread Christian teachings, setting up key institutions in Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay.

By 1813, growing concerns about India's poor educational conditions led to discussions in the British Parliament. The Charter Act of 1813 marked a turning point, officially recognizing education in India and allocating one lakh rupees for its development. A major debate emerged regarding the language of instruction. Some scholars and leaders, including H.H. Wilson and H.T. Prince, advocated for traditional Indian languages like Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. Others, such as David Hare, Lord Macaulay, and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, strongly supported English as the medium of education. This debate ultimately shaped the future of India's academic system⁷⁰.

Education Under the East India Company

The East India Company sought to gain the trust of Indians by showing interest in education. After acquiring Diwani (revenue collection rights) from the Mughal emperors, the Company aimed to establish itself as a better administrator than local rulers. It provided financial grants to existing educational institutions but avoided making significant changes to the system. Both Muslim and Hindu scholars received stipends and rewards, and local elites were offered positions in civil service to secure their loyalty.

The Company also established institutions to educate the nobility. In response to Muslim leaders' requests, Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrasa in 1780 to educate Muslim nobles, offering subjects like Islamic sciences, law, logic, astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy. Similarly, to cater to Hindus, Jonathan Duncan established a Sanskrit College in Benares in 1791, where Sanskrit was the medium of instruction. At Calcutta Madrasa, Arabic and Persian were used, while Hindu religious teachings were emphasized in Benares College. Initially, local scholars led these institutions, but later British officers took over, incorporating elements of both religious traditions.

Despite these efforts, the Company was reluctant to take full responsibility for education in India. Three key reasons contributed to this hesitation:

1. In England, education was largely managed by private enterprises, and the Company wanted to replicate that model.
2. British officials feared that modern education might encourage Indians to resist colonial rule.
3. The Company's primary goal was to educate only the nobility, ignoring the masses, and use educated elites as intermediaries to maintain control.

Additionally, many Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, distrusted British educational institutions, believing that the Company aimed to impose its culture on them. The Company's approach to education remained focused on its own colonial interests rather than the broader intellectual development of Indian society.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Singh & Nath, *History of Indian Education System*, pp. 59–60

⁷¹ Sharma, R. N., & Sharma, R. K. (*History of Education in India*), pp. 77–78.



Charles Grant's Contribution to Education in Mughal India

Charles Grant, who arrived in India in 1773, played a pivotal role in shaping the educational policies of the British era. Observing the deficiencies in the Indian education system, he wrote a detailed report highlighting these issues. Upon his return to England, his recommendations were presented in the British Parliament, leading to discussions on the education system of India. As a result, the British government assumed responsibility for the education of Indians.

Grant strongly advocated for English as the medium of instruction, believing it would introduce modern science, literature, and philosophy to India. He proposed the establishment of educational institutions where initially English teachers would be appointed, later to be replaced by trained Indian educators. His suggestions were eventually implemented, notably in the Charter Act of 1813, which allocated funds for education and allowed Christian missionaries to establish schools across India.

The missionaries actively promoted education and religious teachings, leading to the establishment of schools in major cities like Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay. In 1833, another Charter further expanded the educational policies. Although Indian scholars demanded education in local languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, the British authorities insisted on English as the primary medium of instruction. This decision marginalized traditional Indian languages and altered the cultural and educational landscape of the region⁷².

The introduction of English education created a new class of Indians who were culturally British but ethnically Indian. This group became intermediaries between the British rulers and the local population. Meanwhile, the Muslim community largely resisted the English education system, fearing it would erode their cultural and religious identity. Consequently, many Muslims were excluded from administrative positions, leading to their socio-economic decline⁷³.

Despite its shortcomings, the Mughal education system had been more advanced than that of many European countries at the time. However, the British introduced an education system that primarily served their colonial interests rather than the welfare of Indian society.

Conclusion

Interfaith educational relations have always played a crucial role in intellectual progress and cultural development. The academic connections between Muslims and non-Muslims not only preserved knowledge but also paved the way for new avenues of research and discovery. In the early periods of Islamic civilization, Muslim scholars embraced, refined, and transmitted Greek, Persian, and Indian sciences, which later laid the foundation for the European Renaissance. However, throughout history, the balance between religious and scientific education has shifted. The Mongol invasion and subsequent intellectual trends placed greater emphasis on religious education, leading to a decline in scientific inquiry and rational sciences. Although some Muslim rulers attempted to promote secular sciences, these efforts lacked strong institutional and societal support. Meanwhile, European nations benefited from the Muslim intellectual legacy, using it as a stepping stone for their own scientific advancements, ultimately leading to the dominance of Western educational systems. In today's world, the significance of interfaith academic collaboration is greater than

⁷² Alavi, Muslim Educational Thought in the Middle Ages, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1988, p. 86

⁷³ Sharma & Sharma, History of Education in India, New Delhi, 2006, p. 79



ever. Through intellectual exchanges, dialogue, and joint research, bridges can be built between civilizations and religions. For Muslim societies, it is essential to reclaim their scholarly heritage and revive the tradition of inquiry and innovation. Achieving harmony between religious and scientific knowledge is key to building a balanced, progressive, and enlightened society, where people of different faiths can thrive together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and academic cooperation.

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