



# Progress of Learning During The Reign of Akbar The Great(1556-1605) : A Review

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**Abstract** -After the Mughal conquest of India all kinds of cultural activities, including education received great encouragement. The imperial Mughals were highly educated and cultured princes of their times who extended liberal patronage to education and learning. Both Babur and Humayun were men of literary taste and had great love for education. They set up a number of new educational institutions and repaired the old ones. But particularly Akbar who is regarded as great Mughal ruler showed much great interest in education. It would not be wrong to say that his reign marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of education for Muslim India. He was the first among the muslim rulers of India who made a serious attempt to reform the educational system to suit the national aspirations of the people. His appreciation for educational and cultural values and the policy of religious tolerance and benevolence created a social environment which was highly conducive to the advancement of education and learning. His period of rule witnessed almost a renaissance in the fields of ancient and medieval learning. He extended liberal patronage to the intellectuals belonging to all religious communities and disciplines without discrimination.

**Keywords** - Progress of Learning, During, The Reign, Akbar, The Great, A Review.

With the coming of the Mughals in India(1526 A.D) educational and cultural activities received great encouragement. Babur, the founder of Mughal empire was a man of literary taste and possessed perfect knowledge of persian, Arabic and Turkish languages. He was expert in both prose and poetry. Mirza Muhammad Haider writes in his book Tarikh-i-Rashidi about Babar's literary achievements that "In the composition of Turkish poetry he was second only to Mir Ali Shir ----- He invented a style of verse called Mubaaiyan and was the another of a most useful treaties on Juris prudence ----- He also wrote on Turkish Prosody.<sup>1</sup> But the greatest of all his works is his memoirs entitled 'Tuzuk-i-Babri' which is a masterpiece of his intellectual achievements and monument of his memory. S.M.Jaffar writes that he is rightly regarded as the, 'Prince of autobiographers'.<sup>2</sup> He entrusted an additional work,.i.e construction of

school and colleges, to the Public works Department (shoba-i-Aam).<sup>3</sup> Since then the promotion of education became the direct concern of state. This shows Babar's interest in the wide dissemination of education. Despite his great love for education he could not accomplish much because his reign lasted only for four years (1526-1530).

Humayun (1530-1540, 1555-1556), Babar's son and successor was also a great scholar and known for his love of learning. He provided patronage to men of arts and literature. In spite of many difficulties and disturbance, he rendered valuable service to the cause of education. He established a Madrasah at Delhi where Mathematics, Astronomy and Geography were specially taught. Shaikh Hussain was one of the famous teachers of this madrasah.<sup>4</sup> A teacher who used to teach in a madrasah was known as 'Mudarris' or 'Maulvi Saheb' and other titles of a teacher were 'Ustaad' and 'Shaikh'.<sup>5</sup> A magnificent personal library was attached to his royal palace, called Din Panah or Sher Mandal in Delhi.<sup>6</sup> He also constructed an observatory for his personal use. It is to his credit that he invented an astrolabe known as Usturlab-i-Humayuni.<sup>7</sup> After sustaining injuries in an accidental fall while descending down the stairs of his library his life came to an end.

After the death of Humayun Akbar became the Mughal emperor (1556-1605 A.D.). He was the greatest monarch among all the Mughal rulers and famous for his liberal policies in every sphere of his empire. As far as education is concerned he was the first among the Muslim rulers of India who made a serious attempt to reform the educational system to suite the national aspirations of the people. Abul Fazal's monumental work, entitled Akbarnama, including the Ain-i-Akbari stated that Akbar was fully conscious about the importance of education for the socio-cultural and material advancement of the people.<sup>8</sup> Some prominent features of his education policy were as follows:

1- He provided a secular base to it by making a distinction between the Arabic, and Persian studies. The Arabic studies which dealt almost exclusively with the Islamic scriptures and theology were allowed to flourish as ever before albeit the curricula and scope of Persian studies were broad-based to include many secular subjects, including natural sciences and medical studies, to attract Hindus and Muslims alike. The study of Persian language and literature was popularised on an all-India basis.

2- Akbar expanded elementary education to raise the percentage of general literacy among the masses. He introduced a new curriculum of studies for the makhtabs and suggested improved methods of instruction to the children. Ain 25 of the Ain-i-Akbari, which is devoted to the reorganisation of education, runs as follows:

"In every country, but especially in Hindustan, boys are kept in school for years where they learn the consonants and vowels. A great portion of life of the students is wasted by making them read many books. His Majesty orders that every school boy 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 name of each letter, which may be done in days; then the boy should proceed to write the joint letters. They may be practised for a week, after which the boy should learn some prose and poetry by heart, and commit to memory some verses in praise of God or moral sentences, each written separately. Care should be taken that he learns to understand everything himself but the teacher may assist him a little. He then ought for sometime, to be daily practised in writing a hemistich or a verse, and will soon acquire a current hand. The teacher ought

especially to look after five things; know ledge of letters, meaning of words, the hemistich, the verse, the former 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 that people will be quite astonished."<sup>9</sup>

Akbar prescribed subjects for higher studies in the madrahsas some of which had never found their place in the curriculum of the muslim institutions before; his ordinance to this effect declares:

"Every boy ought to read books on morals, arithmetic, the notion peculiar to arithmetic, mensuration, geometry, astronomy, household matters, rules of government, medicine, logic, the tibiy ilahi sciences (philosophy and metaphysics) and history, all of which may be gradually acquired. In studying Sanskrit the students ought to learn Vyakarna, Niyai, Vedanta and Patan jal (Yogadarshana of Patanjali)."<sup>10</sup>

3- Akbar made an attempt to secularise the teaching process itself by encouraging the Hindus to join the ranks of Persian teachers in the state-run madrassas. It was really a revolutionary step the like of which could never be envisaged before his times. A.L. Srivastava has to say the following on this point:

"One healthy change, a faint beginning of which was made in the time of Sikander Lodhi, continued during the reign of Akbar. It was that hindu students began to be admitted into the maktabas and madrassas. The result was that within half a century there was a large number of hindu scholars, historians and poets of Persian, and some of these excelled in rational sciences and were appointed teachers of the Persian language<sup>1</sup> in the madrassas. There was thus a secular bias imparted to education in the time of Akbar."<sup>11</sup>

4-Akbar introduced the system of grants-in-aid to the educational institutions of the hindus also. He encouraged the muslim scholars to study Sanskrit and Hindi and translate the religious as well as secular literature of the hindus into Persian and Arabic for the benefit of the muslims. Akbar extended liberal patronage to the intellectuals belonging to all religious communities and disciplines without discrimination. The chief sadr (sadr us sadur) of the empire, who was a cabinet minister incharge of the ecclesiastical department and religious endowments, held charge of the educational institutions as well. After the dismissal of Abdun Nabi as the chief sadr by Akbar all those who were appointed to this exalted office were liberal and secular in their religious outlook; they were put under obligations to sanction stipends and scholarships to all the scholars and grants to all the educational institutions. Thus the hindus also became entitled to receive a part of the funds under the charge of the chief sadr which were previously utilised for the spread of Islam and development of education and learning among the muslims alone. As a result of the impetus given by Akbar, the whole of the mughal empire was dotted with maktabas and madrassas. Some prominent Hindu scholars and Historians learnt Persian and made valuable contribution to the cause of education. Some of them were Madho Bhat, Shri Bhat, Bishan Nath, Ram Krishan, Balbhadra Misr, Vasudeva Misr, Bhan Bhat, Vidya Nivas, Gauri Nath, Gopi Nath, Kishan Pandit, Bhattacharji, Bhagirath, Kashi Nath, Mahadeo, Bhim Nath and Narain Sivji etc.

5-Besides Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, the provincial headquarters and other major towns became centres of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit education; the ruling elite and the public, in general, made liberal

contributions to wards the establishment and management of these institutions. He built 'Ibadat Khana' in 1578 in Fatehpur Sikri in the garden of Royal Palace. There were four big halls, each hall was occupied by sayyeds, learned, sufis or shaikhs and noble officers of the Court. In the debating hall discussions were held by the scholars of different schools of thought. It was used as a platform, from which, religious Unity was preached and propagated.<sup>12</sup> A big madrasah was also founded at Agra where the scholars from Shiraz were invited and the students from various places came to attend the lectures of renowned scholars.<sup>13</sup>

6-Akbar displayed a passion for the acquisition of books, and encouraged their production and multiplication. His imperial library at Agra had on its shelves, at the time of the emperor's death, more than 24,000 books, all in manuscript, written by great men, mostly by very ancient and serious authors'. Abul Fazl records: "His Majesty's library is divided into several parts; some of the books are kept within, and some without the Harem. Each part of the library is subdivided, according to the value of the books and the estimation in which the sciences were held, of which the books treat. Prose books, poetical works, Hindi, Persian, Greek, Kashmirian, Arabic, are all separately placed. In this order they are also inspected."

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These books were adorned with attractive and costly buildings, in many cases enriched with beautiful illustrations by the best artists; of course, these were worth millions.<sup>15</sup> Abul Fazl informs us that the imperial library at Agra included 4300 choice manuscripts which had been transferred from the personal library of his elder brother Faizi, the poet laureate, after his death in 1595 A.D. <sup>16</sup> The educational institutions, mosques, khankahs and hindu temples were the places where the books were usually preserved <sup>17</sup> , that is why the historians of the day do not much about the libraries of the period.

7- The art of medieval Indian historiography reached its perfection during the reign of Akbar under whose liberal patronage the Indian scholars, hindus and muslims both, 'cherished and cultivated' it as a full-fledged discipline in its own right. The mughal emperors employed chroniclers, diarists and court historians who maintained profuse records of the royal performance in systematic and chronological order, though usually exaggerated. The scholars wrote not only for literary fame, reward or edification of their patrons but also to satiate their intellectual hunger and inner urge for writing their observations and experiences.<sup>18</sup>

8-Akbar's reign is also notable for the introduction of maqulat or rational sciences as a subject of study in the madrassas and encouragement to industrial and technical education in the state run karkhanas. This step was taken by Akbar on the advice of Mir Fathullah Shirazi, a Persian scholar and scientist who excelled in all branches of maqulat, including physics, chemistry and mechanics. He was an expert in the art of metallurgy. He had come to Bijapur on a special invitation from sultan Ali Adil Shah but, after the death of his royal patron, Akbar called him to Agra and offered him the exalted office of the chief sadr. By virtue of his office, Mir Fathullah also held charge of karkhanas, and ordnance factories. He had a number of mechanical inventions to his credit and one of his hobbies, apart from research and experimentation in rational sciences, was to deliver lectures on maqulat to the old and the young alike. Akbar used to discuss with him various problems regarding the production of heavy artillery, gun-powder and other weapons of war. Some of the mechanical inventions which effected improvement and economy in the state defences have been recorded by Abul Fazl in the Ain i Akbari (Ains 36-38). It was Mir Fathullah who directed the

daroghas or superintendents of various state undertakings to provide vocational training to young boys in the various crafts and trades.<sup>19</sup>

9-The age of Akbar is also described as the period of renaissance in the fields of Persian and Hindi literature. According to an observation, 'the brilliant development of original Hindi poetry in the time of Akbar may be ascribed partly to the undefinable influence exercised by a glorious and victorious reign, which necessarily produces a stimulating effect on all the activities of the human mind. Almost all Hindi poetry of merit is closely associated with the unrestricted practice of Hinduism which was absolutely assured by the government of Akbar.'<sup>20</sup> During his reign flourished saint Tulsi Dass, the celebrated author of Ramcharit Manas or the Tulsi Ramayana. But he never visited the court of Akbar although some of his nobles, including Raja Man Singh and Mirza Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana were his disciples and admirers.<sup>21</sup>

It is noted that during Akbar's reign the nobles of the court also took interest in the cause of education. Maham Anga, the foster mother of Akbar, built a madrasah at Delhi with a mosque attached to it in 1561 A.D. It was called Khairul Manazil.<sup>22</sup> Another well-known madrasah was Madrasah-i-Khwaja Muin, where Mirza Mufti Samarqandi taught for three years from 1571.<sup>23</sup> The liberal educational policy adopted by Akbar for the intellectual and cultural advancement of the Indians remained in full force till the end of Shah Jahan's reign (1658 A.D.) and played an important role in the unification of India politically, socially, religiously and culturally etc.

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