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## **Education and Learning in Mughal India: A Critical Study of Colonial Perceptions\***

### **Abstract**

*Learning and education in Mughal India has inspired divergent views and conflicting assessments. The British historians during the colonial period generally portrayed it in negative colours accusing the Mughals for neglecting mass-scale education, ignoring scientific and technological advancements and following traditional system of rote learning which gradually became out-dated and irrelevant. This criminal negligence, according to them, became the major cause of decline of the Empire and loss of political power. A comparison with the development of knowledge in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is often made to further the argument. This colonial estimation has become a dominant theme in modern academic discourse. The present paper challenges this dominant narrative and argues that it needs to be seriously revised in the light of the new evidence. It emphasises that the colonial viewpoint fails to note two important points: firstly, the colonial perceptions about literary practices in Mughal India were inspired by ethnocentric bias and this research paper by placing this perception in the conceptual framework of Orientalist discourse, reveals that this viewpoint was partisan, subjective and Euro-centric. Secondly, education and learning is a cultural process which cannot be divorced from its social context. If during the Mughal rule in India, the Western world was pulsating with a new vigour of philosophical and scientific ideas, it was not relevant to Indian context as the socio-cultural and epistemological basis on which these ideas developed was entirely different from that of Mughal India.*

**Keywords:** Mughal India, Education, Learning, Colonialism, Imperialism

Mughal rule in India is famous for its display of exorbitant wealth, grandeur of architecture, and development of aesthetic tastes. However, there is also a general view that the Mughal government showed apathy, if not antipathy, towards learning and education. It displayed no enthusiasm towards development of education in general and science and technology in particular. The governments in European countries, on the other hand, were far more sensitive to the educational needs of their subjects. The present article is an attempt to challenge this general perception. The article is divided into two parts and each part seeks to examine one basic question. The first part delves into how the colonial scholarship

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portrayed and presented learning and education in India, particularly during the Mughal period. The second part investigates what did the contemporary and later indigenous and other sources tell us about the literary scene in Mughal India. The last part raises the issue of how much this colonial portrayal was relevant in the context of Indian socio-cultural traditions and what motivated the colonial writers to present a negative picture of Mughal India.

### **a. Colonial Perceptions**

The Mughals were first represented for the West by the European travellers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century and this representation profoundly influenced the early colonial writers as they later resonated the same images and ideas.<sup>1</sup> Though there is divergence of opinion over their relationship with colonialism, yet the fact remains that these travel writings, not yet directly involved in colonial project, set up an epistemic foundation in which Europe became the role model.<sup>2</sup> The European travellers, generally, presented India as traditional, rigid, and ignorant and they applied these views in the areas of Indian learning and education as well. Edward Terry, who came with Thomas Roe, the English ambassador to Emperor Jahangir's court, observed that "there was little learning among them; a reason whereof may be their penury of bookes, which were but few."<sup>3</sup> Francois Bernier, one of the most important travellers of the Mughal period, agreed with this view and called "the majority [of Mughal nobles] being destitute of education."<sup>4</sup> John Fryer also wrote: "the Youth have no other Education besides their Parents, [no] more than some mean Pedagogue's."<sup>5</sup> According to the travellers, the Indians lacked originality and were good only for imitations. Terry wrote about the Hindus that "there were amongst them most curious artificers, who were the best apes for imitation in the world". As far as the Muslims were concerned, they were "generally idle; who are all for tomorrow (a word common in their mouthes). They lived upon the labours of the Gentiles [Hindus]."<sup>6</sup> A Dutch traveller Francisco Pelsaert, who wrote his account after travelling in India in 1626, stated that "for a job which one man would do in Holland here passes through four men's hands before it is finished."<sup>7</sup> And the reason behind this idleness and lack of originality, according to Terry, was that they "grounded their opinions upon tradition, not reason; and were content to perish with their fore-fathers."<sup>8</sup> He also considered the Hindu traditions of hereditary priesthood, caste system and marrying only in their own tribes, sects and occupations, as the proof that "they never advanced themselves."<sup>9</sup> A French traveller, Monsieur Duquesne, endorsed this view and wrote: "If you inquire into the reason of their [Indian] senseless superstitions and ridiculous follies they readily answer that they received them from their Ancestors, in whose Example they Glory in, without the least desire of being better inform'd."<sup>10</sup> Francois Bernier pronounced his judgement on the state of education and learning in Mughal India in the following words:

A gross and profound ignorance reigns in those states. For how is it possible that there should be academies and colleges well founded? Where are those founders to be met with? And if there were any, where were the scholars to be had? Where are those that have means to maintain their children in colleges? And if there were, who would appear to be so rich? And if they would, where are those benefices, preferments and dignities that require knowledge and abilities,

and that may animate youngmen to study?<sup>11</sup> Coming to the colonial period, Robert Orme was the first English writer who expressed his views on Mughal India. He prefixed *a dissertation on the establishment made by the Mohammedan conquerors in Indostan* to his larger work, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British nation in Indostan* which appeared in 1763. He relied on European travellers' accounts for his sources of information and as his sources abounded with the stories of the cruelty and injustices of the Indians, he also narrated such anecdotes without cross-examination. In the third section of his *Dissertation*, the author gives his assessment of state institutions of the Mughals. He concentrated on the weaknesses of the system and gave the detailed account of the despotism and absolutism of the king and his chiefs. Describing the state institutions of justice, he was of the view that because of "the want of a written code, the justice or injustice of the decision depends on the integrity or venality of the judge." After emphasizing the despotism and absolutism of the period, the author turned his attention to explain the cultural and racial characteristics of the people. There again, he highlighted the nomadic character of the people and portrayed them as uncivilized.<sup>12</sup>

Even William Jones—decidedly the foremost figure in the British study of Indian languages and literature and referred to by some enthusiasts as 'Oriental Jones'—did not consider Indian learning as at par with that of Europe and thought of the Indians as 'mere children' in sciences proper. He believed that Europe was the 'fair mistress' while Asia, at its best, the 'handmaid'.<sup>13</sup> One of the earliest and the most characteristic of evangelical work on India was Charles Grant's *Observations*. Charles Grant presented his point of view in the treatise that he printed in private and presented before the Court of Directors in 1797 under the title of *Observation on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals; and on the Means of improving it*. One of its basic premises was that Indian society was 'decadent'.<sup>14</sup> For Grant, the Muslim conquest of India was the divine punishment to the Hindus. Muslim rulers were "bloodthirsty, sensual and bigoted." Their natural tendency towards "pride, ferocity and lawlessness had been encouraged by their religion and hardened by their political success." He remarked that "successive treacheries, assassinations and usurpations" were the basic features of their history.<sup>15</sup> About Mughal administration, he wrote that their administration was extremely oppressive under an absolutely despotic government. Even under the best of their rulers, internal peace remained unknown to Muslim India. According to Grant, "Despotism destroys the liberty of the individual soul and so eliminates the source of virtue because the man who is dependent on the will of another . . . thinks and acts as a degraded being and fear necessarily becomes his grand principle of action."<sup>16</sup> J. S. Grewal writes about his representation of Mughal India that "Grant's explicit statements on Muslim Indian history certainly confirm the idea that the Muslims could not have found a commendable place in Grant's 'meta-history'."<sup>17</sup> He was in fact writing to advocate Christianity to the natives of India.

Alexander Dow's purpose of writing *History of Hindostan* was to give a 'striking contrast' of the conditions of the people in Britain and India and to show the sufferings of Indians under despotic regimes. According to him, without having the knowledge of India's past, no successful policy could be made and his

*History* provided to the English “some idea of his predecessors on the throne of India.”<sup>18</sup> Alexander Dow’s work was dedicated to the English King and it emphatically stated the objective of writing his history as “the people of Great Britain may see a striking contrast of their own condition; and, whilst they feel for human nature suffering under despotism, exult at the same time, in that happy liberty, which they enjoy under the government of a Prince who delights in augmenting the security and felicity of his subjects.” One of his arguments was that the Muslims were totally ignorant of Hindu learning. He questioned the authenticity of Muslim accounts of the religion and history of the Hindus as “their prejudice makes them misrepresent the former [Hindu religion], and their ignorance in the Shanscrita [Sanskrit] language, has totally excluded them from any knowledge of the latter [history of the Hindus].”<sup>19</sup> Though Dow conceded that majority of the Muslim monarchs were educated and some of them had developed literary tastes, yet, on the whole, “The education of the natives of Asia is confined [to] that of young men of distinction always private.” He further contended that these young men spent their childhood in *haram* [female quarters] and were only allowed to come out under the care of eunuchs who, according to the author were “a race of men more effeminate than the women whom they guard.” The overall consequence of such upbringing was that the children imbibe[d] in early youth little female cunning and dissimulation, with a tincture of all those inferior passions and prejudices which are improper for public life. The indolence, natural to the climate, is encouraged by example. They loll whole days on silken sofas; they learn to make nosegays of false flowers with taste, to bathe in rose-water, to anoint themselves with perfumes, whilst the nobler faculties of the soul lose their vigour, through want of cultivation. They receive little benefit from his instructions, and they advance frequently into life, without having their minds embued with any considerable knowledge of letters.<sup>20</sup>

Mountstuart Elphinstone’s *History of India* is considered one of the most important works during the colonial period. It has dealt with Mughal period in detail. Its first volume starts with ‘General Description of India’ in which Animals and Minerals have even been mentioned but there is no mention of education and learning. The author is all praise for the Hindu learning during ancient period and while comparing them with the contemporary Greeks, he considered the former superior to the latter.<sup>21</sup> However, in later days, this emphasis on learning and education disappeared and he scantily mentions some individual efforts of Muslim monarchs, especially those of Akbar to acquire some learning. Otherwise, it was a tale of unmitigated warfare, bloodshed and treachery. He wrote that Purely Mahometan literature flourished most in India during the period to which we are now adverting, and fell off after the accession of Akber. Improvements in science were, doubtless, obtained from Hindu and European sources; but, I believe, there is no eminent specimen of Persian composition in India after the epoch mentioned.<sup>22</sup> James Mill’s *History of India* focused more on the Hindu period. He seriously questioned the achievements of Hindus in the ancient period. He raised doubts that “How extensively this elementary knowledge is diffused, we have received little or no information.” His overall assessment of the Hindus was that “the truth is that institutions for education more elaborate than those of the Hindus are found in the infancy of civilization.”<sup>23</sup> Mill was of the view that Islamic civilization was superior to the Hindu civilization. However, Mill’s representation

of Muslim India is largely negative. He saw Indo-Muslim history “as a monotonous tale of unprovoked aggression, unprincipled ambition, insurrection, disorder, insecurity and tyranny as well as of dynastic revolutions.” It appeared to Mill that confusion was the ‘common fate’ of all Indo-Muslim sovereignties, whether great or small. Even in the much praised and prosperous reign of Akbar, there was hardly a moment of tranquillity. In fact the spirit of rebellion was inherent in the very principles of government in Muslim India because of the absence of an accepted law of succession. Insecurity was diffused over all his dominions in India where robbery, murder and insurrection were ‘ever ready to break loose’. Mill was inclined to attribute the ills of Muslim Indian history to the despotic form of Indo-Muslim government which, in his considered view, was “more inimical to progress than anarchy itself.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Mill, Muslim civilization in India reached its zenith under Shah Jahan. For Mill, the fifteen years of Shah Jahan’s reign from 1640 to 1655 were supposed to be the most prosperous phase of Muslim rule in India. It was believed in fact that his numerous subjects “now enjoyed a tranquillity and happiness such as had seldom, if ever been experienced in that part of the globe.” Mill, however, suspected that this favourable impression of the reign was a result of accepting the Persian chronicles as literally true in their general eulogies of Shah Jahan. Bernier’s description of his arrival at the court of Shah Jahan was enough to convince Mill that all eulogies of peace and tranquillity must be suspected. This discovery disposed him to discount the authority of Persian chroniclers on other periods in Muslim Indian history. According to him, “never was justice better administered in India than under the reign of Shah Jahan; yet knowing more of the circumstances of his reign, we know better what the general eulogies of the Oriental historians mean.” In India, there was “a hideous state of society’ much inferior in acquirements to Europe even in its ‘darkest feudal age.”<sup>25</sup> His arguments convinced the general public because Mill’s *History*, once published held the field unchallenged for more than twenty-five years, being reprinted in 1820, 1826, and 1840. In 1848, Hayman Wilson produced another edition of Mill, with elaborate footnotes and an extension of the story from 1805 to 1834. Mill’s *History*, in effect over the whole middle of the nineteenth century, provided the “main basis for British thought on the character of Indian civilization and on the way to govern Indians.”<sup>26</sup> The first half of the nineteenth century was the period when great debate over the appropriate form of education in British India was raging with full pace amongst the Orientalists and Anglicists. However, interestingly, the language issue—whether vernacular or English—acquired the centrality of the debate and the system of traditional learning in India was never considered worth exploring. However, Thomas Macaulay’s famous or rather infamous ‘Minute on Education’ which turned the tables against the Orientalists based its arguments on degrading the traditional system of education. Macaulay’s remarks that “. . . a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia”<sup>27</sup> reveal dominant colonial discourse of pre-colonial literary position of India and they remain “an important part of the history of cultural imperialism.”<sup>28</sup> Without claiming that this response was monolithic and dissident voices were not present, it can be safely said that even during the Anglican-Orientalist debate over the mode of instruction in nineteenth century India, the Orientalists never took this position that oriental learning in pre-colonial

period was as important as the English education to justify its patronage by the colonial government.<sup>29</sup> In this way, one may say that the European visitors as well as the colonial historians believed that India was devoid of any sound learning during the Mughal period and there were no schools, colleges or universities worth the name. The Indians lacked creative instincts and impulses of originality. They just imitated the works of others and were generally lethargic and languid. This happened because of long tradition of living under despotic rule which sapped their creative energies and made them sluggish and indolent. Thus, during the so-called golden periods of Indian history, they could hardly be compared with the Europeans of the dark ages.

### **b. Indigenous Perspectives**

These observations of European travellers and even of later writers remained a dominant theme of discussion in the colonial discourse of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They have not yet lost their relevance and one often hears such statements that Mughal India was a static and traditional society which lacked any spirit of scientific thinking and critical investigation. This (mis)conception led to the prevalent notion that in learning, Mughal India was no match to contemporary Europe which was far advanced in education.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, one still often comes across such observations that public education began in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent with the advent of British rule and before that, no such system existed. In the words of one scholar, “this perpetuates the European myth that we were all ignorant savages and barbarians before the White Man came to educate and civilize us.”<sup>31</sup> The facts are startlingly different. There is no doubt that the Indian chronicles of the period were mainly pre-occupied with narrating political events and generally overlooked important information on social aspects, particularly scientific and technological innovations. However, such information is not totally absent; one has to look into some informal or alternate sources like *malfuzat* (sufi discourses), *tazkirahs* (collective biographies) or even poetical works to collect such evidence.<sup>32</sup>

The fact of the matter is that during the Mughal rule, educational facilities were provided at a grand scale and there was no dearth of educational institutions. Even in a small and far off city of Thatta in Sind under Aurangzeb, there were four hundred schools, imparting education in different branches of learning; while Bengal could boast of 80,000 schools, with a ratio of one school per forty people, at a time when the Mughal Empire was in decline.<sup>33</sup> In the beginning of colonial period, on the basis of a survey conducted in Bengal Presidency, veteran Indian historian, K.M. Pannikar, claims that one lakh indigenous elementary schools existed which had been established and were run by natives themselves, without direct interference from the government. One cannot but agree with him that “the ratio of one elementary school to every 400 persons or for every 73 children of school going age, in spite of the limited facilities and the nature of their organization, compares favourably with any country in the world.”<sup>34</sup> Thus there is credible evidence to prove that the range of education in Mughal India was at a massive scale. Another allegation which is generally levelled against the Mughal government is that its curriculum was outdated and lacked rational, particularly technical subjects. It is a fact that the earlier curriculum prevalent in schools was revised during the Mughal period. In the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Abul Fazl has given a list

of subjects taught in schools. These included theology and ethics, history and politics, accounting and arithmetic, mensuration and agriculture, engineering and astronomy, domestic science and medicine, logic and philosophy, and physical and mechanical sciences.<sup>35</sup> Emperor Akbar was particularly interested in improving the standard of education and he brought about many reforms in *madrasah* curriculum. Beside the above mentioned subjects, geometry, economy, grammar, law, physics and geography were added to the curriculum. Hindus got education side by side with the Muslims. But they also studied Hindu ideology and religious philosophy (Vedant), Sanskrit grammar (Viyakran) and Hindu mysticism (Patanjali). There was also stress on vocational subjects as the belief was that the people should not neglect those subjects which in their daily lives proved useful.<sup>36</sup>

Traditionally the transmitted subjects dominated the curriculum but at the beginning of the sixteenth century, rational sciences began to receive greater attention. One of the major influences, contributing to this development was the arrival of Mir Fathullah Shirazi (d. 997/1589) from Iran to India.<sup>3738</sup> Fathullah Shirazi's influence was tremendous which could be traced down to Mulla Nizam al-Din (d. 1748) of Farangi Maḥal who, in the early eighteenth century, initiated Dars-i Nizamiyya, which became the basis of modern curriculum of *Madrasah* education in South Asia.<sup>39</sup> Dars-i-Nizamiyya also brought about a change in the style of teaching as it emphasized comprehension, rather than rote learning. Thus one can say that although education was mainly based on religious sciences, this never resulted in the marginalization of other disciplines. Various incidents can be mentioned to reveal the scientific and critical thinking and to negate the allegations of European travellers and later writers that it was a dogmatic and static society. A contemporary writer has reported that the Portuguese brought tobacco in the court of Akbar. Some nobles of the court opposed its use as being an unfamiliar substance. However, Emperor Akbar's comments tell us about the spirit of the age: "we must not reject a thing that has been adopted by the wise men of other nations merely because we cannot find it in our books; or how shall we progress?"<sup>40</sup> Emperor Jahangir's scientific outlook can be gauged by even a cursory reading of his *memoirs*. Two Indian scholars, M. A. Alvi and A. Rahman, after a careful scrutiny of *Jahangirnama*, had to accept that the monarch was keenly interested in scientific inquiry. They report that

"Jahangir did not belong to the community of the scientists. Nevertheless, his *Memoirs* that form primarily a historical document of his reign, contain a good deal of information on natural history and science which, for its accuracy, meticulousness of observation and originality, could well qualify any author of his times to claim of such distinction. Jahangir maintained a big aviary and a menagerie, carried out observations, tests and experiments. Often he would order a specimen to be dissected in his presence, keep records for ascertaining long range phenomena and take down measurements and weights."<sup>41</sup>

One can safely conclude that this developed education system produced far reaching results and it is no coincidence that during the Mughal period, one "frequently encounter[ed] such encyclopaedic personalities who in all respects were the leaders of theoretical and practical spheres." These included such personages as Mir Fathullah Shirazi, Abul Fazl, Abdurrahim Khan-i-Khanan, Saadullah Khan, Tan Sen and Jai Singh etc. The tradition of learning continued

even after the end of the Mughal rule. Major Sleeman, a British officer, who had spent thirty-five years in India, wrote in 1844, that “Perhaps there are few communities in the world among whom education is more generally diffused than among Muhammadans in India. He who holds an office worth twenty rupees a month commonly gives his sons an education equal to that of a prime minister. They learn, through the medium of the Arabic and Persian languages, what young men in our colleges learn through those of the Greek and Latin—that is, grammar, rhetoric, and logic. After his seven years of study, the young Muhammadan binds his turban upon a head almost as well filled with the things which appertain to these branches of knowledge as the young man raw from Oxford—he will talk as fluently about Socrates and Aristotle, Plato, and Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna.”<sup>42</sup> On the basis of this evidence, K. M. Ashraf has concluded that ordinary British officers were afraid to talk to the Muslims of noble families as it could expose their knowledge as the Muslims could refer to Greek philosophers extensively in their day to day talk.<sup>43</sup>

In 1700, the population of India was twenty times that of United Kingdom. India’s share of total world output at that time has been estimated at 24 per cent—nearly a quarter, Britain’s share at 3 per cent.<sup>44</sup> It can be pointed out that high level of economic output and productivity was not possible without innovative methods and novel techniques of trade and industry. Due to the development of trade and industry, the Mughal period saw the rapid growth of urban middle class. Generally the modern historians have overlooked this phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> It was undoubtedly a period of urbanisation as big cities, with large populations, emerged and consequently, middle class grew in numbers. Hameeda Khatoon Naqvi, a medieval historian of urbanisation, rightly notes that “when the Great Mughals took over the rein of government, the urban development was pushed up to zenith . . . [and] the urban population of Hindustan in absolute numbers was substantially higher in c. 1700, when the region was at the peak of economic prosperity than, say in the year 1911, when old crafts were in decay and the modern form of industries had yet to fill in the gap.”<sup>46</sup> In the seventeenth century, the industrial production reached the peak in Mughal India and India was the largest producer of industrial goods in the world. The colonial economic historian, W. H. Moreland, who otherwise never lost an opportunity to record British accomplishments, had to concede that “it is still to my mind indisputable that in the matter of industry India was more advanced relatively to Western Europe than she is today.”<sup>47</sup> Tara Chand also records that,

“Indian production covered a wide range of goods—fine cotton and silk fabrics, metalwork in iron, steel, brass, copper, gold and silver. Indian swords and weapons were greatly prized; Indian copper and brass vessels and gold and silver ornaments were famous. The skill of Indian goldsmiths, jewellers, workers in pearls and precious stones, was the wonder of the world. The manufacture of boats and ocean-going ships was highly advanced. . . . Many ships were employed in foreign trade. They visited the ports of the Persian Gulf, East Africa and South-East Asia. The art of ship-building in India was ahead of that of Europe. . . . But the most important industry was that of textiles. It was spread all over the country, but Dacca, Banaras, Agra, Multan, Burhanpur, Lahore, Ahmedabad, Patna, Baroda, Broach and Surat were important centres. The fine muslins of Dacca, the

silks of Bengal and the brocades of Banaras were justly famous. In the seventeenth century the export of textiles to Europe consisted of nearly 8,000 bales. Indian calicoes were popular in England which absorbed nearly a million pieces every year.”<sup>48</sup>

We can conclude by the revealing remarks of G.W. Leitner who, while compiling his report on the state of education in the Punjab, wrote about the pre-colonial situation:

“Respect for learning has always been the redeeming feature of ‘the East’. To this the Panjab has formed no exception. Torn by invasion and civil war, it ever preserved and added to educational endowments. The most unscrupulous chief, the avaricious money-lender, and even the freebooter, vied with the small landowner in making peace with his conscience by founding schools and rewarding the learned. There was not a mosque, a temple, a dharmshala that had not a school attached to it, to which the youth flocked chiefly for religious education. There were also thousands of secular schools, frequented alike by Muhammadans, Hindus and Sikhs, . . . There was not a single village who (sic) did not take a pride in devoting a portion of his (sic) produce to a respected teacher. . . . In short, the lowest computation gives us 330,000 pupils (against little more than 190,000 at present) in the schools of the various denominations who were acquainted with reading, writing and some method of computation; whilst thousands of them belonged to Arabic and Sanskrit colleges, in which Oriental literature and systems of Oriental Law, Logic, Philosophy, and Medicine were taught to the highest standards.”<sup>49</sup>

### **c. Orientalist Perspectives**

The third part of this paper seeks to place this imperialist view of Mughal education and learning in the context of Indian socio-cultural tradition. It argues that these colonial and even modern writers considered education and learning as divorced from its societal norms and cultural milieu, and thus traditional and static. As Ronald Inden argues that “Knowledge is . . . always underdetermined by its very situatedness. There are always different knowledges that can be constructed in a particular situation. Different arrangements from the standpoint of different agents with different purposes are always possible.”<sup>50</sup> One of the reasons for the ignorance or non-appreciation of Indian formal educational practices by the Europeans was that its epistemological basis were radically different from that of Europe. This explains why Bernier, who was himself a learned man and well-versed in Western philosophy,<sup>51</sup> failed to mention compilation of *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* and founding of the seminary of Farangi Mahal, two important academic achievements of Mughal India. We can take the example of printing press to comprehend the issue. Moveable printing press was first set up in the middle of the fifteenth century in Europe and for the next hundred years or so, it completely metamorphosed the western society and brought about intellectual and cultural revolution.<sup>52</sup> It played the most significant part in bringing about religious and social changes and in the spread of learning and education. It was mainly instrumental in the cultivation of scientific attitudes and technological innovations. The Jesuit fathers brought the technology to India in the sixteenth century. They even established some printing presses in Goa and started printing books in local

languages. However, the Indian ruling class did not accept the new technology. The elites failed to respond to it and printing could not be introduced prior to nineteenth century, four hundred years after it started getting established in Europe. The problem why did the South Asian society not adopt print technology when it was available and why did it remain impervious and indifferent to printing. This question has been examined in different ways. Most of the scholars consider it a sign of the hold of orthodox *ulama*, who due to their obduracy and obscurantism, coupled with their fear that new technology would open up floodgates of religious innovation (*bida*) and would be a serious challenge to their authority, opposed it. A modern intellectual considers this as “internal haemorrhage” more inimical and lasting, than the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols and opines that “the *ulema* managed to achieve what the external forces could not accomplish: the erection of a barrier between the Muslim populace and their fundamental texts.”<sup>53</sup> However, a more cogent argument and plausible explanation came from Francis Robison who argued that the Muslim negative response to printing was far deeper than the attitude of the *Ulama*. He writes that “The problem was that printing attacked the very heart of Islamic systems for the transmission of knowledge” Oral transmission and “person to person transmission was at the heart of the transmission of Islamic knowledge”. Printing struck right at the very root of this system; “it struck at the heart of Islamic authority.”<sup>54</sup> That was the reason that not just in India but in the whole of the Muslim world, printing could not take roots till the establishment of colonial rule.

One can conclude by saying that colonialism instituted such “hierarchies of subjects and knowledges” which were manifested in the forms of the colonizer and the colonized, the Occidental and the Oriental, the civilized and the primitive, the scientific and the superstitious, the developed and the underdeveloped. The postcolonial school has made us aware that “such dichotomies reduced complex differences and interactions to the binary (self/other) logic of colonial power.”<sup>55</sup> There is essential need that we “free ourselves from the necessary polemics” of colonial historiography<sup>56</sup> and develop the confidence to evaluating our own culture and society on our own terms.

## Notes & References

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<sup>1</sup> For a study of the relationship of European travel writing and colonialism, see, Faraz Anjum, “European Travel Writing and Western Perception of Indo-Muslim Civilization in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 44, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>2</sup> William Dalrymple calls them “unwitting contributors to later colonialism.” Idem. “Introduction: Travels, Travel Writing and Mughal India,” in *Visions of Mughal India: An Anthology of European Travel Writing*, ed. Michael H. Fisher (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Terry’ Account, in *Early Travels in India 1583-1619*, ed. William Foster (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, First Indian Edition, 1985), 309. Here after *Terry’s Account*.

<sup>4</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D.1656-1668*, ed. and tr. Archibald Constable (London: Archibald Constable and Company, MDCCXCI; reprint, Karachi: Indus Publications, n.d.), 212.

- <sup>5</sup> John Fryer, *A New Account of East India and Persia, Being Nine Years' Travels, 1672-1681*, ed. William Crooke (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1909; reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992), I: 281-82.
- <sup>6</sup> *Terry's Account*, 324.
- <sup>7</sup> Francisco Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India*, trans. From the Dutch by W.H. Moreland and P.Geyl. (Cambridge: W.Heffer and Sons, 1925), 60.
- <sup>8</sup> *Terry's Account*, 325.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.
- <sup>10</sup> Monsieur Duquesne, *A New Voyage to the East Indies in the Years 1690 and 1691* (London: Printed for Daniel Dring at the Harrow and Crown, 1696), 89.
- <sup>11</sup> Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, 229.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert Orme, *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nations in Indostan from the year Mdcclxla, to which is prefixed a dissertation on the establishment made by the Mahomedan conquerors in Indostan*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 3 vols. (London: Printed for John Nourse, mdccclxxv), 1:25.
- <sup>13</sup> The Works of Sir William Jones, 13 vols. (London, 1807), III, 1-9, 19, quoted in Mohibul Hasan, *Historians of Medieval India* (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1982), 218. For a detailed study, see, S. N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth-Century British Attitudes to India* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968).
- <sup>14</sup> Richard B. Barnett, *Rethinking Early Modern India*. (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 13-14.
- <sup>15</sup> Cited in Ainslie Thomas Embree, *Charles Grant and British Rule in India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 43, 39.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.
- <sup>17</sup> J. S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: Assessment of British Historians* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1970), 67.
- <sup>18</sup> Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan, Translated from the Persian*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, mdccxcii), I: iii.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, I:v-vi.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 421-22.
- <sup>21</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, second ed. MDCCCXLIII), I: 94-95.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 212-13.
- <sup>23</sup> James Mill, *The History of British India*, 10 vols. (London: Routledge/Thoemess, 1997, reprint of 1858 ed.), III: 80-83.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 256, 281, 301,302,305,325.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 146, 186, 333.
- <sup>26</sup> For a critical survey of colonial historiography in India, see, Muhammad Shafique, *British Historiography of South Asia: Aspects of Early Imperial Patterns and Perceptions* (Islamabad: NIHCR, Centre of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University, 2016).
- <sup>27</sup> See the full text of Macaulay's Minute in "Document Fourteen: Minutes recorded in the General Department by Thomas Babington Macaulay, law member of the governor-general's council, dated 2 February 1835, in *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843* eds. Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir (Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 161-173
- <sup>28</sup> Zastoupil and Moir, eds. *The Great Indian Education Debate*, preface, ix.
- <sup>29</sup> Macaulay was aware of this fact when he wrote: "The intrinsic superiority of the western literature is indeed fully admitted by those Members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education." *Ibid.*, 161-173
- <sup>30</sup> M. N. Pearson comparatively analyzed medical knowledge in India and Europe and wrote "we can see clearly the beginnings of European superiority and Asian failure to keep up in this particular area." "The Thin End of the Wedge. Medical Relativities as a Paradigm of Early Modern Indian-European Relations," *Modern Asian Studies*, 29 No. 1 (Feb., 1995): 144. However, strangely he has totally on European travellers coming to India, particularly Bernier and Fryer, and has completely neglected the indigenous medical works.
- <sup>31</sup> Asad Zaman, "Our Traditional Educational Systems," *Pakistaniat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* 2 no. 1 (2010): 104-05.
- <sup>32</sup> Shaikh Nurul Haq, son of Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dihilvi, in his general history of India, has mentioned two scientific wonders of the Mughal period: a curious box and an apartment. See extracts of *Zubdatu-t Tawarikh* in H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, eds. *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, 8 Vols. (Reprint, Lahore: Islamic Book House, 1979 [1867-77]), VI: 192-94.

- <sup>33</sup> Syed Altaf Ali Brelvi, "Development of Education," in *Islam in South Asia*, ed. Waheed-uz-Zaman and M. Saleem Akhtar (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1993), 153.
- <sup>34</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (London: Anthem Press, 2001), 50
- <sup>35</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, translated by H. Blochmann, 3 vols. bound in 2 (reprint, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2006 [1927]), II: Ain 25.
- <sup>36</sup> Brelvi, "Development of Education," 152-53.
- <sup>37</sup> For the contribution of Mir Fathullah Shirazi, see M.A. Alvi and Abdur Rahman. *Fathullah Shirazi: A Sixteenth Century Indian Scientist* (New Delhi, 1968); S. M. Azizuddin Husain, "Mir Fathullah Shirazi's Contribution for the Revision of the Syllabi of Indian Madrasas during Akbar's Reign," in S.M. Azizuddin Husain, ed., *Madrassa Education in India: Eleventh to Twenty First Century* (New Delhi, 2005), 24-36; Ali Anoshahr, "Shirazi Scholars and the Political Culture of Sixteenth-century Indo-Persian World," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 51 no. 3 (2014): 331-352.
- <sup>38</sup> Abd-ul-Qadir bin Malik Shah al-Badaoni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, tr. George Ranking, W.H. Lowe and Wolsley Haig, 3 Vols. (Calcutta, 1884), III: 109-238..
- <sup>39</sup> Francis Robinson has traced a direct line of transmission from Fathullah Shirazi to Mulla Nizam al-Din, see *The Ulama of Farangi Mahal and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (Delhi, 2001).
- <sup>40</sup> Asad Beg, *Wikaya-I Asad Beg*, in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, VI: 167.
- <sup>41</sup> M. A. Alvi and A. Rahman, *Jahangir—The Naturalist* (New Delhi: National Institute of Sciences of India, 1968), 4.
- <sup>42</sup> W. H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an India Official*, rev.ed.(London: Humphrey Milford, 1915 [1844]), 280 & 410.
- <sup>43</sup> Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf, *Indian Historiography and Other Related Papers*, trans. from Urdu: Jaweed Ashraf (New Delhi: Sunrise Publications, 2006), 68.
- <sup>44</sup> Nial Ferguson, *Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 22, cited in Zahid Shariff, "Orientalism and Pakistan," *Lahore Journal of Policy Studies*, 3 no. 1 (December 2009): 41.
- <sup>45</sup> See for example, Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd revised ed. 1999[1963]; and Satish Chandra, *The Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court* (Aligarh, 1959) which have generally neglected trade and industry.
- <sup>46</sup> Hameeda Khatoon Naqvi, *Mughal Hindustan: Cities and Industries, 1556-1803*, 2nd ed. (Karachi: National Book Foundation, 1974), 302 and 310fn.
- <sup>47</sup> Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar*, 55.
- <sup>48</sup> Chand, *Society and State in the Mughal Period*, 53-54.
- <sup>49</sup> G.W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Panjab since Annexation* (Calcutta: The Superintendent of Government Printing India, 1882), i.
- <sup>50</sup> Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 33
- <sup>51</sup> For the importance of Bernier, see Peter Burke, "The Philosopher as Traveller: Bernier's Orient," in *Voyages and visions: Towards a Cultural history of travel*, ed. Jas Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubies (London: 1999): 124-137.
- <sup>52</sup> For the impact of printing on western history and culture, see, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *Coming of the Book: Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*, tr. David Gerard (London: NLB, 1976).
- <sup>53</sup> Ziauddin Sardar, "Paper, Printing and Compact Discs: The Making and Unmaking of Islamic Culture" in *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, eds. Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 102.
- <sup>54</sup> Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 66-104.
- <sup>55</sup> Gyan Prakash, "Introduction: After Colonialism," in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.
- <sup>56</sup> Romilla Thapar, *Past and Prejudice*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1975), 2.