

Aurengzeb's Problem

Francois Bernier, the famous French traveler, visited India during 1657-1668 in the reign of Aurengzeb Alamgir (d. 1707) who was the last stable Moghul emperor of India. When he became the king of India, one of his teachers came to him to get a good position in the Indian Civil Administration. Aurengzeb discussed some issues with his teacher about the education system of that time. His views demonstrate the weaknesses of our education. The situation has not been improved since last 300 years. Bernier, who was present at that moment, has described the speech of Aurengzeb. He said:

Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall.
Confucius

Mullah Gi! Monsieur the Doctor! Do you pretend that I ought to exalt you to the first honors of the state? Let us then examine your title to any mark of distinction. I do not deny you would possess such a title if you had filled my young mind with suitable instruction. Show me a well-educated youth, and I will say that it is doubtful who has the stronger claim to his gratitude, his father or his tutor. But what was the knowledge I derived under your tuition?

You taught me that the whole of Franguistan (Europe) was no more than some inconsiderable island, of which the most powerful monarch was formerly the King of Portugal, then he of Holland, and afterward the King of England. In regard to the other sovereigns of Franguistan (Europe), such as the King of France and him of Andalusia (Spain), you told me they resembled our petty Rajas, and that the potentates of Hindustan eclipsed the glory of all other kings; that they alone were Humayons, Jehan-Geeres, or Shah Jehans; the Happy, the Great, the Conquerors of the World, and the Kings of the World; and that Persia, Usbec, Kachguer, Tartary, and Catay, Pegu, Siam, China and Matchine trembled at the name of the Kings of the Indies.

Admirable geographer! Deeply read historian! Was it not incumbent upon my preceptor to make me acquainted with the distinguishing features of every nation of the earth; its resources and strength, its mode of warfare, its manners, religion, form of government, and wherein its interests principally consist; and by a regular course of historical reading, to render me familiar with the origin of States, their progress and decline; the events, accidents or errors, owing to which such great changes and mighty revolutions, have been affected?

Far from having imparted to me a profound and comprehensive knowledge of the history of mankind, scarcely did I learn from you the names of my ancestors, the renowned founders of this empire. You kept me in total ignorant of their lives, of the events which preceded, and the extraordinary talents that enabled them to achieve their extensive conquests.

A familiarity with the languages of surrounding nations may be indispensable in a king; but you would teach me to read and write Arabic; doubtless conceiving that you placed me under an everlasting obligation for sacrificing so large a portion of time to the study of a language wherein no one can hope to become proficient without ten or twelve years of close application.

Forgetting how many subjects ought to be embraced in the education of a prince, you acted as if it were chiefly necessary that he should possess great skill in grammar, and such knowledge as

belongs to a Doctor of Law; and thus did you waste the precious hours of my youth in the dry, unprofitable, and never-ending task of learning words!

You gave my father, Shah Jehan, to understand that you instructed me in philosophy; and, indeed, I have a perfect remembrance of your having, during several years, harassed my brain with idle and foolish propositions, the solution of which yield no satisfaction to the mind, propositions that seldom enter into the business of life; wild and extravagant reveries conceived with great labor, and forgotten as soon as conceived, whose only effect is to fatigue and ruin the intellect, and to render a man headstrong and insufferable (*their Philosophy abounds with even more absurd and obscure notions than our own – Bernier*).

O yes, you caused me to devote the most valuable years of my life to your favorite hypotheses, or systems, and when I left you, I could boast of no greater attainment in the sciences than the use of many obscure and uncouth terms, calculated to discourage, confound, and appall a youth of the most masculine understanding (*their Philosophers employ even more gibberish than ours do – Bernier*): terms invented to cover the vanity and ignorance of pretenders to philosophy; of men who, like yourself, would impose the belief that they transcend others of their species in wisdom, and that their dark and ambiguous jargon conceals many profound mysteries known only to themselves.

علوم الحدیث کیا ہیں؟ ان میں کن مباحث کی تعلیم دی جاتی ہے؟ صحیح و ضعیف حدیث میں کیا فرق ہے؟ صحیح اور من گھڑت احادیث میں فرق کیسے کیا جاتا ہے؟ اس کی تفصیل کے لئے "[علوم الحدیث: ایک تعارف](#)" کا مطالعہ فرمائیے۔

If you had taught me that philosophy which adapts the mind to reason, and will not suffer it to rest satisfied with anything short of the most solid arguments; if you had inculcated lessons which elevate the soul and fortify it against the assaults of fortune, tending to produce that enviable equanimity which is neither insolently elated by prosperity, nor basely depressed by adversity; if you had made me acquainted with the nature of man; accustomed me always to refer to first principles, given me a sublime and adequate conception of the universe, and of the order and regular motion of its parts; – if such I say, had been the nature of the philosophy imbibed under your tuition, I should be more indebted to you than Alexander was to Aristotle, and should consider it my duty to bestow a very different reward on you than Aristotle received from that Prince.

Answer me, sycophant! Ought you not to have instructed me on one point at least, so essential to be known by a king; namely, on the also to have foreseen that I might, at some future period, be compelled to contend with my brothers, sword in hand, for the crown, and for my very existence? Such, as you must well know, has been the fate of the children of almost every king of Hindustan.

Did you ever instruct me in the art of war, how to besiege a town, or draw up an army in battle array? Happy for me that I consulted wiser heads than thine (you) on these subjects! Go! Withdraw to thy (your) village. Henceforth let no person know either who thou art (you are), or what is become of thee.

(Author: Francois Bernier, Excerpts from Travels in the Mogul Empire)

Think about it!

- List the problems in education system identified by the Moghul Emperor.
- What reforms are required in our syllabus?

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