

# **Mughal India (1550-1605)**

## **Module-5**

### **India on the eve of Babur's invasion and military technology**

#### **Academic Script**

##### **Early career**

Zahir-ud-din Mohammad Babur after defeating Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat in 1526 founded the Mughal empire in India. He descended from two central Asian warriors, Timur, the Turkish hero, and Chengez Khan, the leader of the Mongols. He was the fifth descendant of Timur on the side of his father and fourteenth descendant of Chengez Khan through his mother.

##### **Invasions of India**

On the death of his father Umar Sheikh Mirza, Babur inherited the ancestral kingdom of Farghana in 1494. On account of his precarious position in Central Asia, Babur, after crossing the Indus, invaded India for five times. The first real expedition took place in 1519 when he captured Bhera. His fifth expedition to India was the Battle of Panipat in April 1526.

## **First Battle of Panipat(1526)**

The Battle of Panipat ended in Babur's decisive victory. According to Anil Chandra Banerjee, Babur had 12,000 troops when he entered India, but many Indian mercenaries probably joined him during his victorious march through the Punjab region. In any case there is no doubt that the Lodi army was numerically stronger. But Babur was far superior as a general to Ibrahim Lodi. Babur was strong in artillery- both match-lock and guns- and its use in battle was a new development in Indian warfare. Ibrahim Lodi had no artillery and the Afghans did not know how to defend themselves against well-directed firing. Moreover, the Afghan army was a composite body consisting mainly of tribal levies recruited by the nobles, not a well-organised fighting force under a single capable leader.

The political importance of the first battle of Panipat should not be exaggerated. It was decisive in so far as it sealed the fate of the Lodi dynasty, but it did not crush the power of the Afghans. It marked the end of the first phase of the Mughal-Afghan struggle for power which was the leading feature of North Indian history for three decades (1526-56). The rich treasures stored by the Lodi Sultans at Agra relieved Babur of his financial difficulties. Babur had to wage two hard-fought battles, one against Rana Sanga of Mewar, and the other against the eastern Afghans before he could consolidate his position. Thus politically the battle of Panipat was not as decisive as it

was militarily. However, it marks a new phase in the struggle for the establishment of a hegemonic political power in north India.

### **Initial difficulties**

Panipat opened to Babur the gates of Delhi. On 27<sup>th</sup> April 1526 the khutba was read in his name and he was hailed as the Emperor of Hindustan. From Delhi Babur proceeded to Agra which had already been captured by his son Humayun. Here he found 'remarkable dislike and hostility between its people' and the Mughals. There was military danger as well. Several Afghan chiefs rose against the conqueror at different centres- Sambhal, Bayana, Mewar, Dholpur, Gwalior, Etawa, Kalpi-and set up Mahmud, Ibrahim Lodi's brother, as a claimant to the throne. But they laid down their arms when they realized that Babur, instead of following Timur's example, intended to stay and rule over Hindustan.

### **Rajput resistance: Battle of Khanua (1527)**

Babur's conquest of Hindustan would have been incomplete till he defeated Rana of Mewar. The Rana of Mewar, Sangram Singh, had sent a friendly embassy to Babur when he was in Kabul and offered his aid against Ibrahim Lodi. Apparently he hoped that Babur, following Taimur, would be a mere raider and the throne of Delhi would be left vacant. But Babur's policy after Panipat clearly proved that his intention was entirely different. Sangram Singh decided to challenge him. He had on his

side many Rajput chiefs as also the Afghan ruler of Mewat. A decisive battle took place on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1527 at Khanua, a village some 37 miles west of Agra. Babur's tactics and his skillful use of artillery gave him decisive victory. Sangram Singh, badly wounded, took to flight.

Just as the battle of Buxar (1764) confirmed and completed the success won by the English at Plassey (1757), so also Khanua confirmed and completed Babur's victory at Panipat. He had still to face the Afghan threat in Eastern India, but the Rajput threat was finally overcome. The security of the new Mughal State in the Delhi- Agra region was assured by the collapse of Rajput resistance.

### **Battle of the Gogra (1529)**

Babur strengthened his foothold over Mewat (April, 1527) after the battle of Khanua. A few months later (January 1528) he captured the fortress of Chanderi in Malwa from Medini Rai, a powerful Rajput chief. Babur's next step was a successful campaign against the Afghans in Awadh (February-March, 1528). A year later he undertook an expedition against the Afghan chiefs who had concentrated their forces in Bihar under Mahmud Lodi. With an army of 100,000 men they made a formidable effort to crush the Mughal power in infancy. But they were disunited. Mahmud Lodi, deserted by some of his Afghan allies, sought refuge with the army of Sultan Nusrat Shah of Bengal which was massed at the

confluence of the Ganges and the Gogra in Bihar. Here Babur fought and won his third great battle in India (May, 1629). Babur's sovereignty in Bihar was recognized and a treaty of peace was concluded with Sultan Nusrat Shah.

### **Political Achievement of Babur**

The battle of Gogra made Babur the undisputed master of North India. He died at Agra on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1530, having appointed Humayun his successor.

Babur's political achievement formed a 'link between predatory hordes and imperial government, between Timur and Akbar'. Though he emulated Timur, but did not play Timur's role in India. His original intention was to annex the Punjab region to his Central Asian territories, but political developments led him to aim at capturing the entire Lodi heritage. After Panipat he shifted the centre of gravity of his power from Kabul to Delhi.

But Babur had neither the time nor the talent to lay the foundations of a system of imperial government even though he assumed the title of Emperor of Hindustan. The first three years of his Indian career – from Panipat to Gogra – constituted a period of fighting and insecurity. Free from the Rajput and Afghan threats, he had less than two years' time to organize an administration in a country of which neither he himself nor his trusted officials had any previous knowledge.

The empire built up by Babur by sword was not integrated by administrative devices. About one –fifth of his Indian territories were held by old zamindars and rais in virtual internal sovereignty. The territory directly under his authority was assigned to his amirs who enjoyed full administrative power. In short, Babur was not gifted with that consummate political genius which enabled his grandson, Akbar to organize an empire remarkable for strength, homogeneity and efflorescence of culture.

### **Babur's Army**

Babur's army consisted of Turks, Mongols, Iranians and Afghans. It was built as a veteran core which had been campaigning alongside him for over a decade and thus the troops and commanders were confident, and familiar with each other. It also had an element of equality where any trooper could dine with Babur or give his opinion on tactics in contrast with the tiered hierarchy in the Sultanate army. And they were campaigning far away from home, where defeat would mean annihilation with nowhere to retreat. All these factors contributed to better morale. The army was organized along Timurid lines - units of 10, 50, 100, 500, and 1000. Babur's army at Panipat numbered 15,000–20,000 men.

The bulk of them were Timurid cavalry, supplemented by Turkish gunners with gunpowder matchlocks and cannons-till now an unknown feature on the Indian battlefield.

Cavalry was the centerpiece of the Mughul army. Babur's horsemen would have been composed of horse archers — mainly Mongols recruited from central Asia and masters of steppe warfare and also Turks and heavy melee cavalry (who may also use bows). Even the horse archers in the Mughul army wore full armor.

Babur's infantry was of two main types. Foot archers armed with composite bows and a secondary weapon and more importantly matchlock musketeers. Ratio of archers to matchlock men was 4:1. Both weapons had about the same effective range of 100 yds. But bowmen had almost three times the rate of fire while matchlocks had unparalleled armour penetration and lethality, capable of stopping a horse or even an elephant dead in its tracks. Matchlock musketeers were called *Tufang* or *Bunduqchi* and used a protective mantle as a cover when firing the weapon. Matchlock men in Babur's service were mostly of Turkish origin.

Gunpowder weapons were introduced in central Asia by the Mongols who brought them from China, but these were very rudimentary mainly siege devices. The Ottomans developed gunpowder weapons quite early along with the Europeans. In the first decades of the 16th century the newly equipped Ottoman gunpowder armies inflicted stunning defeats on their Safavid rivals who in a crash program equipped themselves with similar weapons. Babur who was in intimate contact with Safavid

military developments at this time possibly acquired these weapons in the same manner.

Babur began a new epoch in Indian military history with the introduction of field artillery which he would use for devastating impact. Four the basic models were used by Babur — the *zarb-zan*, (light cannon), *kazan*, (heavy cannon), *kazan-i-bozorg* (siege gun) and *firingi* (swivel/anti-personnel gun) with only the first 2 types present at Panipat. Babur's artillery used only stone shot. Stone was cheap and plentiful, but the production of stone cannon balls was extremely labor intensive. Metal was more expensive, but metal shot was much easier to make. Stone projectiles were not as dense as metal and transferred less energy to the target, but they might also shatter on impact, producing lethal shrapnel as a secondary effect. Metal ammunition did have one very important advantage — it could be made hollow. When left empty such projectiles were lighter and could travel further. When loaded with gunpowder, they could be fused to explode on impact. They were not horse drawn but rather mounted on carriages. Babur had 20 cannons at Panipat.

### **Autobiography**

A detailed record of Babur's career is found in his autobiography (*Tuzuk-i-Baburi* or *Baburnama*) which he wrote in Turki, his mother-tongue. It was translated into Persian four times in the sixteenth and seventeenth



centuries. It is by no means a dry historical composition; it is a masterpiece of literary creation. It is 'reckoned among the most enthralling and romantic works in the literature of all time.' Written in a style which is 'plain and mainly as well as lively and picturesque', it presents Babur's 'countrymen and contemporaries in their appearance, manners, pursuits and actions as clearly as a mirror.' Babur, in his autobiography, frankly mentions his faults and foibles- even his vices. His world renowned Baburnama helps to understand the linkages between South and Central Asia in sixteenth century and provides an excellent background to those researchers who want to understand and explore contemporary linkages between these two regions.

### **Character**

Babur's character is revealed to us through intimate details recorded in his autobiography. Though a gifted poet and a lover of nature, he was primarily a soldier and a man of action. During his rule trade flourished and exchange of people between South Asia and Central Asia increased. Many sufis/ saints migrated from Central Asia to the Indian Subcontinent. In religion Babur was an orthodox Sunni, but he had to conform to some Shia rites and practices with a view to conciliating Shah Ismail of Persia. Although he established his permanent residence in India after Panipat he sighed for the hills of Farghana, the domes and minars of Samarqand and the flowers of

Kabul. Several years after his burial at Agra his body was removed to its present grave at Kabul.

## **Summary**

In this lecture we have discussed certain facets of Babur life which are such as:

- His early life
- Invasions of India
- The First Battle of Panipat (1527)
- The Battle of Khanua (1528)
- Battle of the Gogra (1528)
- Political Achievement of Babur
- Babur's Army
- Autobiography
- Character