



INDIA UNDER THE EARLY MUGHALS A CASE STUDY OF BABUR AND HUMAYUN

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A Timurid prince, 'Umar Shaykh Mirza, ruler of Farghana, died in 899/1494, leaving little more than a title to his principality for his son Babur, then eleven years old. Babur had to fight not only to defend Farghana but also to fulfil his ambition of possessing Samarqand because of its prestige as the main city of Central Asia. His adventures described in his excellent memoirs read like a romance. He did succeed in occupying Samarqand, only to lose it again. His lasting possession proved to be Kabul which he occupied in 910/1504, and which became his headquarters. All else, including Farghana, he lost in the struggle.

The rise of the Uzbeks and the Safavids affected Babur's career deeply. The Uzbeks were able to extinguish the power of the Timurids because they proved incapable of serious and joint effort. The Safavids came into conflict with the Uzbeks and defeated them. Babur was restored to the kingdom of Samarqand as a vassal of Shah Isma'il I after the defeat and death of Muhammad Shaybani Khan Uzbek (917/1511). The Safavids were defeated in the battle of Ghujduwan, and Babur lost all hope of ruling Samarqand, and returned to Kabul (918/1512). When Babur felt secure, his mind turned towards India. Ibrahim Lodi, the sultan of Delhi, had alienated his nobles. Dawlat Khan, the governor of Lahore, sent messengers to Kabul offering allegiance in return for help. Ibrahim's uncle, 'Alam Khan, also went to Kabul seeking assistance to capture the throne of Delhi. Babur, who had made some incursions into the Panjab before, now marched, ostensibly to help Dawlat Khan, and captured Lahore. Dawlat Khan, finding that Babur had no intention of handing over Lahore to him, turned hostile. In the meanwhile 'Alam Khan attacked Delhi with the help of some Mughal troops without success. Babur, whose attention had been diverted because of the siege of Balkh by the Uzbeks, returned and heard at Sialkot of 'Alam Khan's failure. Dawlat Khan surrendered and died soon after, Ibrahim marched from Delhi, while Babur occupied Panipat and waited for Ibrahim.

The first battle of Panipat (932/1526) is remarkable because Babur succeeded in defeating an army of 100,000 men and 1,000 elephants with a small force of about 25,000. Babur entered Delhi and his eldest son, Humayun, was sent to Agra. Babur's name was read in the khutba as the emperor of Hindustan. Thus was established the Mughal empire. Babur had still to contend with formidable forces. The remnant of the Afghan nobles elected Ibrahim's brother, Mahmud, as sultan. Rana Sanga of Chitor, the head of a strong Rajput confederacy, saw in the debacle of the Lodis the opportunity of gaining vast territories; but Babur defeated him at Khanua in 933/1527.

Babur then turned his attention to Mahmud Lodi. The decisive battle was fought in 936/1529 near the confluence of the Gogra (Ghagra) with the Ganges, where Babur was once again victorious. He was also able to conclude a treaty of peace with Nusrat Shah, the king of Bengal. A year afterwards Babur was taken ill, and died in 937/1530, nominating Humayun as his successor.



Babur was not only a valiant soldier and a capable general but also an accomplished writer and a poet of merit. His memoirs are famous. Because of his preoccupations, some entries are sketchy as if made in a diary, but in other places the reader is fully compensated by Babur's excellent pen-pictures of important contemporaries. He has also recorded a considerable amount of natural data of which he seemed to be a keen observer. In addition there are his essays in criticism of literary works and paintings, buildings and institutions. Outstanding is his great sincerity, which prevents him from indulging in self-praise or hiding his shortcomings. He emerges as a lovable, generous, capable and brave man, who wins the admiration and sympathy of the discerning reader by telling all about himself, whether creditable or otherwise.

Humayun succeeded to the throne without any trouble, but later on his younger brothers, Kamran, Askari and Hindal created problems for him. After his defeat at the hands of Babur, Mahmud Lodi had fled to Bengal. Now he invaded the Mughal territories and took Jawnpur. Humayun marched against him and gained a decisive victory. The sultan of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah, thought it opportunities to send three columns against various points in Mughal territories, all of which were defeated. Bahadur Shah, who had been besieging Chitor, turned after its fall towards Humayun, who had reached Mandasor, only sixty miles away, in pursuit of one of the Gujarat columns. Bahadur Shah, instead of attacking Humayun, entrenched himself in a camp. The Mughals cut off all supplies, and ultimately Bahadur Shah had to escape to Mandu (941/1535).

Humayun followed him. The fort fell, and Bahadur once again escaped with the Mughals in pursuit. He succeeded in reaching Diu (Diu). Humayun, leaving Askari at Ahmadabad, returned to Mandu to organize the administration of Malwa. 'Askari did nothing to oust Bahadur Shah from Diu, nor did he organize the administration. Bahadur Shah was soon able to collect a force, and marched towards Ahmadabad. Askari retreated in the direction of Agra. Thus Gujarat was won and lost in a little over one year time. It was reported to Humayun that Askari's followers had treasonable designs, so Humayun left Malwa and marched towards Agra, meeting Askari's forces on the way, but did not punish Askari because, in addition to the loss of Gujarat, there had come news of difficulties with the Afghans in the east. After Humayuns marched from Mandu. Malwa was seized by Mallii Khan who had been governor before the Mughal occupation.

At this juncture Humayun encountered a formidable rival in the Afghan, Sher Khan, the son of Hasan Khan who held the parganas of Sahsaram, Hajlpur and Khawaspur Tanda. Farid, as Sher Khan was originally called, fled from Sahsaram to Jawnpur because of his father's coldness, as Hasan was completely under influence of Farid's stepmother. At Jawnpur he devoted himself to his studies, and, when his father once visited Jawnpur, struck with Farid's capability that he invited Farid back and put him in charge of his parganas. Here Farid showed his great talent for good administration.

This further eroused jealous his step-mother's and he was soon forced to leave again, and seek service in Agra at the court of Ibrahim Lodi. After the Sultan's defeat at Panipat, Farid attached himself to the self-appointed Sultan Muhammad of Bihar. It was in his service that, one day, while accompanying the Sultan for hunt, Farid slew a tiger with a sword, and received the title of Sher Khan. He was also appointed tutor to

the Sultan's young son, Jalal Khan. After an interval in the service of Babur, he returned to the court of Sultan Muhammad, where he was restored to his former position. The sultan died shortly after; his son, Jalal Khan, being a minor, his mother became the regent and appointed Sher Khan as her agent. Thus, he became the virtual ruler of Bihar. When the queen died he became the king.

Sultan Muhammad of Bengal sent a force against Bihar which was defeated with heavy losses. He sent another army, and this time the nobles persuaded Jalal Khan to dismiss Sher Khan. He retired to Sahsaram, and Jalal Khan joined forces with Bengal. At this Sher Khan enlisted more troops, advanced against the Bengal army, and defeated it. Jalal Khan escaped into Bengal, and Sher Khan held absolute power of Bihar. The treasures, animals and equipment left by the two Bengal armies had enriched and strengthened him. He then acquired the strong fort of Chunar on the Ganges through marriage with the widow of its commandant. Mahmud Lodi now took possession of Bihar, leaving only his parganas to Sher Khan, who reluctantly joined him, but refrained from actively supporting the sultan against the Mughals. Mahmud Lodi was defeated and, being unable to raise a new army, retired to Orissa, where he died in 949/1542.

During all this time Sher Khan had been quietly building up his power. He accumulated arms and devised a plan to seize the hoarded treasures of the rulers of Bengal. When reports of Sher Khan's activities reached Humayun, he marched against Chunar, which was captured after a difficult siege in 944/1537. While Humayun was busy besieging Chunar, Sher Khan marched into Bengal and took Gawr. Sher Khan, knowing full well that Humayun would follow him into Bengal, lost no time. He removed his booty to the hills of southern Bihar, which he intended to use as a base against the Mughals. He also gained by a stratagem the fort of Rohtas, where he put his family and his newly acquired treasures. Humayun marched to Bengal and, delighted with its virtue, prolonged his stay. He posted Hindal on the north bank of the Ganges to guard his line of communication.

South Bihar is hilly, and, being covered with thick jungle, is impenetrable by cavalry. The sole means of communication was through the Teliyagahri pass. Sher Khan, who knew the terrain well, harassed the Mughal communications, so that Hindal deserted his post; he retired to Agra with rebellious intentions. Sher Khan took all the area between Banaras and Teliyagarhi. Bengal was thus turned into a prison for Humayun by the superior strategy of Sher Khan. At last Humayun realized his danger, marched out and reached Chawsa, where he halted, unaware of Sher Khan's position.

Sher Khan's forces soon appeared, and, instead of attacking them when they were tired. After resting his troops, Sher Khan attacked Humayun, who was taken by surprise. The Mughal army was thoroughly defeated (946/1539). After the battle, Sher Khan proclaimed himself sultan, with the title of Sher Shah.

While Humayun was in difficulties in Bengal, Hindal did not help him, and had indulged in treasonable activities at Agra. Kamran also moved from Lahore, and established himself in Agra. Humayun and 'Askari were able to reach Agra with great difficulties, and Sher Shah occupied Bengal. Kamran left Humayun in this desperate situation and retired to the Panjab. Sher Shah after having consolidated his position in Bengal, marched against the Mughals. Humayun advanced from Agra and stopped near Kannawj, with Sher Shah on the other bank of the Ganges. Defections forced

Humayun into crossing the river. The Mughals fought a half-hearted battle, and Sher Shah's 10,000 troops put Mughal force of 40,000 to flee (947/1540).

After this defeat Humayun reached Agra, but there was no chance of taking stand, he evacuated Agra and, after a halt at Delhi, hurried on to Lahore, followed in close pursuit by the Afghans. Lahore was abandoned. His progress towards Afghanistan being barred by Kamran, Humayun turned towards Sind, where he had no success. He received an invitation from Raja Maldeva of Marwar, and he faced great difficulties in reaching there, only to discover that the raja had turned against him. He returned facing even greater hardships. Ultimately he reached 'Umarkot, where the ruler gave him shelter. It was here that Akbar was born in 949/1542. Humayun could not stay long at 'Umarkot and decided to go to Qandahar. Askari, who was the governor of Qandahar on behalf of Kamran, strengthened his defences, and instigated some Baluch chiefs to arrest Humayun, who escaped, but Akbar fell into their hands and was sent to Askari. Humayun entered Persia as a refugee, and, after many humiliations and difficulties, secured small reinforcements in 952/1545 from Shah Tahmasp to fight against Kamran. A protracted struggle ensued, until Humayun succeeded in ousting Kamran. Askari, who had remained faithful to Kamran, was captured and was sent to Mecca, where he died in 965/1558. Hindal was killed in a night attack by an Afghan (959/1551). Kamran joined, for a while, the court of Sher Shah's son, Islam Shah, but disappointed with his contemptuous reception he ran away, and finally fell into Humayun's hands. In spite of pressure from the courtiers, Kamran was not executed, but was blinded and sent to Mecca, where he died in 964/1557.

After Humayun's departure from Lahore, Sher Shah occupied the Panjab, Malwa and Ranthambhor. He punished Puranmal of Raysen for having massacred the Muslim inhabitants of Chanderl and enslaving Muslim and Hindu women. He brought Marwar and Mewar under his control. Then he marched against Kalinjar, which he besieged. A rocket, rebounding from the gate of the fort, fell into a heap of ammunition in proximity the sultan. He was severely burnt, and was carried to his tent. The officers were summoned and commanded to take the fort, and before sunset he received the news of its capture by storm. He died (952/1545).

Sher Shah was a good general and a great strategist, as the way he trapped and defeated Humayun shows. He has been highly praised for his efficient administration. The lessons learnt in his youth in administering the parganas of his father were never forgotten, and he stands out as one of the greatest administrators who ever sat on the throne of Delhi. He was just, tolerant and benevolent. He took interest in the welfare of his subjects, improved communications, built and repaired caravan serais, and took steps to maintain peace and order. He rose from being a student in exile to be first ruler of Bihar, and then the sultan of Delhi. Afghan writers, who wrote with considerable nostalgia in the days of Akbar, exaggerated his originality, though not his capacity as an administrator. Sher Shah had very little time at his disposal to create new institutions. He was, however, a keen student of history, and succeeded in putting into action the administrative machinery, which had been considerably damaged by disturbed conditions.

He was succeeded by his son, Islam Shah, who was brave and determined, but suspicious by nature, and harsh in his dealings. Because of his harshness, his brother Adil Khan (another son of Sher Sah) was favoured by some nobles, which set Islam

Shah against him. Adil Khan was defeated, and fled towards Patna where he disappeared, but Islam Shah's campaign against the nobles continued, and there is little else to narrate about the reign. On his death (961/1554) his son Feroz was raised to the throne. His brother-in-law, Mubariz Khan, marched at the head of a strong force towards Gwalior, where he forced his way into the presence of the young king and, despite the entreaties of the mother, murdered the boy and ascended the throne under the title of 'Adil Shah. He displayed little tact and even less capacity. Relations between the nobles and the sultan were embittered because of his harshness. A cousin of the sultan, Ibrahim Khan Sur, came to know that an attempt was to be made on his life. He fled from Gwalior, occupied Delhi and assumed the royal title. Adil Shah then grew suspicious of another cousin, Ahmad Khan, whom he intended to remove, but he was warned by his wife, the sultan's younger sister. He left Gwalior and escaped to Delhi. There he quarrelled with Ibrahim, and, having defeated him near Agra, occupied Delhi, and proclaimed himself sultan as Sikandar Shah in 962/1555. There were now three sultans: Aadil Shah, whose authority extended over Agra, Malwa and Jawnpur; Sikandar Shah, who was supreme from Delhi to Rohtak in the Panjab; and Ibrahim Shah, who ruled the foothills of the Himalayas in the Panjab. A fourth contender for position was a petty shopkeeper of Rewari called Hemu who had gathered all local power into his hands.

The power of the Surs being thus divided. Humayun decided to try his luck again. He captured Lahore, Jullundar (Jalandhar), Sirhind, Hisar and Dipalpur. Sikandar marched with an army of thirty thousand, was defeated at Machiwara, and retired into the hills. Samana fell soon after, and from there Humayun marched upon Delhi, which he occupied. Forces were sent into the Do'ab. However, before much could be achieved, he fell from the stairs of his library, and died two days later in 963/1556.

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