

## Module - II

### Military History of Medieval India



Note



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## MILITARY SYSTEM OF THE MUGHALS

As you have learnt in the previous lesson the Muslim rulers of Delhi who called themselves the 'Sultans' acknowledged the authority of the 'Caliph'. However, when the Mughal rulers came to power, they repudiated the authority of Caliph and called themselves as 'Padshah'.

Another remarkable development during this period was that the European Trading Companies started establishing themselves in India. The Portuguese followed by the Dutch, the Danish, the English and the French—all came to India but they were not able to make much headway up to the time of Aurangzeb. However, as you will see later the throne became virtually vacant after the death of Aurangzeb. For all these factors it is said that with the arrival of Mughals, a new age started in the history of India.



### Objectives

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- describe the dynamics of Mughal Empire in India and
- explain the Mughal military structure

### 6.1 Overview of Mughal Empire

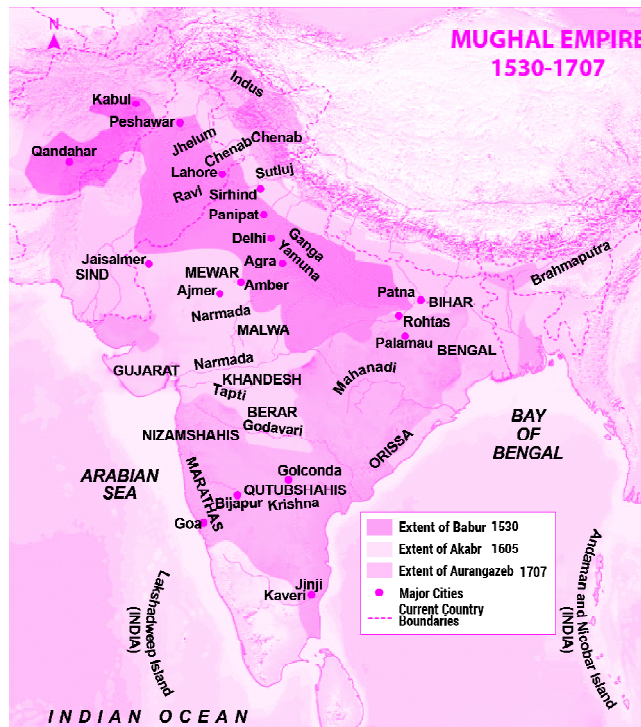
Mughals from Central Asia ruled India for more than three hundred years - from 1526 up until 1857 - when the last Mughal ruler was overthrown and British established their control. During these three hundred years of Mughal period the military underwent many changes. We can learn all this from the recorded history of the battles that they had fought. Who established the Mughal empire? How did they come to India? And who were the prominent rulers? Here are the answers to these questions.



**Note**

The Mughal Empire in India was founded by Babur. He established himself in Kabul and then invaded India from Afghanistan through the Khyber Pass.

It was in a battle at Panipat, which is now located in Haryana that Babur defeated the numerically superior forces of the last of Delhi Sultan Ibrahim Lodi. With the defeat of the last Delhi sultan ruler, Babur fought with the Rajputs under Rana Sanga of Mewar, and by 1529 he dismantled the Afghans of Gangetic Plains. On his death in 1530, he left behind a new Empire which encompassed all of northern India from the Indus River on the West to Bihar on the East, and from the Himalayas in the North to Gwalior in South.



**Map 6.1 Mughal Empire**

After Babur's rule his son, Humayun took over power and assumed the throne in 1530, but in a short period of 10 years he was driven out of India into Persia by the Afghan rebels. However, Humayun made a triumphant return from Persia to India again in 1555.

The other prominent ruler that the Mughal dynasty saw was Humayun's son Akbar, who established the throne under the administration of Bairam Khan in 1556. It was during Akbar's rule, 'Mughal influence' through out the country reached its political height. Akbar left behind an internally stable state with reliable political, administrative and military structures.

Akbar's son Jahangir inherited both his father's administrative system and his tolerant policy toward subjects but he neglected the affairs of the state and came under the influence of rival courtiers. His rule did not continue for long and it passed on to his son Shah Jahan who took over power in 1628. However, his rule also saw financial

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problems. The country witnessed maintenance of the court costing more than the revenue. Later in 1658, as a result of Shah Jahan's illness his eldest son, the liberal Dara Shikoh assumed the role of administrator. But, Shah Jahan's younger son, Aurangzeb took over power as the sixth Mughal emperor by executing Dara Shikoh. Although Aurangzeb succeeded in expanding the empire to its greatest extent, his political and religious intolerance proved fatal to the stability of Mughal society.

The last emperor, "Kaiser-i-Hind" Bahadur Shah II was exiled by the British, after his involvement with the Great Uprising of 1857.



### Intext Questions

6.1

1. Who were the Mughal kings after Babur ? Name any three kings.
2. When was the first battle of Panipat fought?
3. What was the reason for weakening of Aurangzeb's empire?

### 6.2 The Mughal Military Structure

As the Mughals came from Central Asia they brought the Central Asian military tradition along with them. A new style of combat was adopted due to the arrival of gunpowder and with that a new kind of tactics was also employed. Earlier, this was not the case since fighting predominantly revolved round the use of horses and elephants with weapons like bows, arrows, swords and shields. But from now on a new phase of military combat was adopted that focussed on the use of artillery and the use of muskets, bombs, etc. This does not mean that the older weapons were completely replaced. In fact, they were complemented with new ones particularly the artillery.

This contributed to the change in battlefield tactics about the deployment of the units in the battle, the positions of the infantry, cavalry and artillery in battlefield and how they had to be employed. And not only were there changes in the adoption of military tactics but also corresponding changes in the manner in which these different military units were to be maintained. New organisations were created with civilian administrative institutions.

As far as the structure is concerned, the Mughal Army consisted of cavalry, infantry, and artillery. Among these, artillery held a subordinate position compared to that of the infantry and cavalry. Besides, elephants were also used. Under the Mughals, the emphasis on the numbers and quality of the horse in an army. However, it was the artillery that was used extensively to break through the enemy forces and defeat them. Even during the first battle of Panipat, the artillery played an important role in defeating Ibrahim Lodhi's forces.

- a) **Artillery:** The general name given to this branch was Top-khanah. Babur's artillery was of two kinds, the heavy and the light, or "as they call the latter, the artillery of the stirrup. The heavy artillery was called the 'Kazan' or heavy canon



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which was able to fire balls of about 20-25 pounds in weight while the lighter canon was called 'zarb-zan' which was mobile and could be moved in different places and was able to fire 3 to 4 pound weight of projectile. The Kazan were big guns and were used against forts and fortified positions. Since these canons were heavy it was difficult for the army to move or maneuver them effectively during battles. In such cases, it was the lighter canons the Zarb-Zan which was effective as it was quite mobile.

Besides, there was also a third kind called 'firingi' or Frankish canon, which was much smaller than the zarbzán. The last kind of Babur's artillery consisted of a heavy siege gun which fired projectiles of about 100 pounds or more.

- b) **Elephants:** Long before the Mughal Empire fell into decay, elephants had become principally beasts of burden or means of display, and their role in the battle reduced significant. Yet, Akbar made much use of elephants by bringing them into the field in great numbers. Under Akbar the elephants ridden by the emperor were called khasah (special), and all others were arranged in groups of ten, twenty or thirty, called halqah. The Elephants were aggregated as groups and formed a single division.
- c) Discipline in the military was extremely lax, if not entirely absent. Once thrown into confusion, it was impossible to restore a Mughal army's discipline. During the march they moved without order, with the irregularity of a herd of animals.

The Mughal military had an elaborate system of arrangement to take care of invasions. There was a person called Mir Tuzak (literally, Lords of Arrangement) whose responsibility was to identify the route, decide on the marches and proceed ahead, select a place for encampment and lay out the site of the various camps and the lines of shops. When carrying out these duties, the first Mir Tuzak was more commonly known as Mir Manzil, Lord of the Stages.

- d) **Camps:** Each soldier had a tent as shelter. Outside the gate of the enclosure were the elephants and horses with their establishments on one side; and the records, the carts and litters, the general of artillery, and the hunting leopards on the other. The heavy artillery was ranged at a distance and defended the approaches.
- e) **On the March:** The heavy artillery went first, followed by the units of the infantry called the advance guards. The baggage followed the combat unit. In the baggage first came the camels carrying the imperial treasure. Immediately behind these came the imperial kitchen. The army came after the baggage.



Note

- f) **Equipments:** During battles, the Mughals used a wide variety of weapons. The generic name for arms and armour was silah (plural aslah). Broadly, they can be classified into short arms and weapons for distant attacks.

#### *6.2.1 Short arms ranged into five classes. They were:*

- 1) swords and shields,
- 2) maces,
- 3) battle axes,
- 4) spears and,
- 5) daggers.

Besides the above, the Mughals also used weapons for more distant attacks. They were of three different types:

- 1) the bow (Kaman) and arrow (Tir),
- 2) the matchlock (banduq or tufang) and
- 3) the pistol (tamanchah).

Of these three, the Tir-Kaman was the most popular. In fact, it served as the primary weapon of the cavalry, and the Mughal horsemen were famed for their archery.

"The sword was better than the dagger, the spear better than the sword, the bow and arrow better than the spear."

The generic name of a sword was tegh (Arabic), shamsher (Persian) or talwar (Hindi). The Arabic word saif was also used occasionally. One kind of short-sword was called the nimchah-shamsher. Apart from these there were many other kinds of weapons that were used. They are as follows:

**DHUP** (asa-shamsher, i.e. staff-sword): a straight sword, adopted from the Dakhin. It had a broad blade, four feet long and a cross hilt. It was considered as an emblem of sovereignty and high dignity and was therefore displayed on state occasions.

**SIROHI:** "Whoever was struck on the head by these Indian blades was cleft to the waist, or if the cut were on the body, he was divided into two parts."

**PATTA:** a narrow-bladed, straight rapier.

**GUPTI:** a straight sword having a walking stick as its sheath.

Along with the sword naturally comes the shield; then known as chirwah & tilwah.

The mace (gurz) usually formed part of the equipments of a Mughal warrior. The battle-axe (tabar) was a triangular blade with one broad cutting edge. The usual generic name used for spears of all kinds was the Arabic word sinan. The head or point was called sunain, and the butt was the bunain. Besides these, there were also other varieties of daggers that were in use. To name some of them: Jamdhar, khanjar, katta and peshqabz.



### Intext Questions

6.2

1. Name the different branches of Mughal military.
2. What were the different kinds of artillery used by Mughals called?
3. How did the Mughals organize themselves during invasions?
4. List some of the weapons used by the Mughals.



### What You Have Learnt

- The Mughals hailed from Central Asia;
- Their military traditions were superior to those of the Delhi Sultanates who were not administered properly;
- The Mughal army was well organized and reached its zenith during the rule of Akbar;
- Cavalry was the main arm as it provided greater mobility;
- The artillery was the supporting arms of the Mughals;
- The technological and tactical surprise that the artillery contributed was unparalleled;
- Various kinds of weapons were used and discipline was ensured



### Terminal Exercises

1. Who were the prominent rulers under Mughal dynasty?
2. How was the Mughal military system organized?
3. Give an account of the weapons used by Mughals.



### Answers to Intext Questions

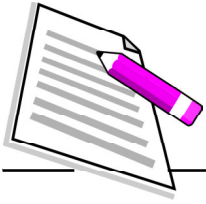
#### 6.1

1. Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shahjahan and Anuragzeb etc. (Any Three)
2. April, 1526 A.D.
3. Policy of political and religious intolerance.



Note

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**Note**

### 6.2

1. Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery and Elephants.
2. Heavy and light artillery.
3. Heavy artillery first followed by the infantry called as the advance guards and then logistics units comprising of the camels bearing the imperial treasure. The treasure was succeeded by the hunting establishment, which was followed immediately by the imperial kitchen. The entire army came after the baggage.
4. Swords, battle-axes, spears, daggers and maces.