

UNIT 100 – UPSC - Medieval India History - Babur

India's History : Medieval India : Reign of Babur (1526-1530)

Babur - The First Mughal Emperor



Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur founded the Mughal Empire in India after defeating Ibrahim Lodhi in the Battle of Panipat in 1526.

At the age of 14, Babur ascended the throne of the Central Asian kingdom of Farghana. His greatest ambition was to rule Samarkand. He fought many battles in the pursuit of this goal, winning and losing his kingdom many times in the process. In 1504, he ventured into what is now Afghanistan and conquered Kabul.

His position in Central Asia was precarious at best. In order to consolidate his rule, he invaded India five times, crossing the River Indus each time. The fifth expedition resulted in his encounter with Ibrahim Lodhi in the first battle of Panipat in April 1526. Babur's army was better equipped than Lodhi's; he had guns while the sultan relied on elephants. The most successful of Babur's innovations was the introduction of gunpowder, which had never been used before in the Sub-continent. This combined with Babur's newer tactics gave him a greater advantage. Babur's strategy won the war and Ibrahim Lodhi died fighting.

Panipat was merely the beginning of the Mughal rule. Akbar laid its real foundation in 1556. At the time of the battle of Panipat, the political power in India was shared by the Afghans and the Rajputs. After Panipat, the Hindu princes united under Rana Sanga, the Raja of Mewar, resulting in a sizable force. Babur's army showed signs of panic at the size of the huge opposing army. To prevent his forces retreat, Babur tried to instill confidence in his soldiers by breaking all his drinking cups and vessels, and vowed never to drink again if he won. His soldiers took heart, and when the armies met in the battle at Kanwaha, near Agra on March 16, 1527, Babur was able to win decisively. Kanwaha confirmed and completed Babur's victory at Panipat. Babur thus became the king of Central India.

In 1528, he captured Chanderi from the Rajput chief Medini Rao, and a year later he defeated the Afghan chiefs under Mahmud Lodhi in the battle of Ghagra at Bihar.

These conquests made Babur the "Master of Hindustan". He was not destined to enjoy the fruits of his conquests as he died shortly afterwards in Agra on December 26, 1530. He was buried at Kabul in accordance with his wish.

The Mughal age is famous for its many-faceted cultural developments. The Timurids had a great cultural tradition behind them. Their ancestral kingdom at Samarkand was the meeting ground of the cultural traditions of Central and West Asia. The Mughals brought with them Muslim cultural traditions from Turko-Iranian areas, which inspired the growth of the Indo-Muslim culture.

Reign of Babur (1526-1530)



Turks were patrons of the arts and education. They often were poets in Persian or Chaghatai Turkish; amateur painters or calligraphers; and singers or instrumentalists. The Turks were fine warriors, capable of handling a sword as dexterously as a brush or a pen. They loved palaces, gilded tents, fine clothing and rich accouterments. The Turks were collectors of books and paintings who eagerly sought out every new luxury.

Babur had attempted to capture Delhi more than once but had lacked the resources to mount a sufficiently large expedition. However, the steady decline in popularity of Delhi's Sultan Ibrahim was a factor working strongly in Babur's favor. Babur seized the opportunity by uniting his followers in an adventure which, if successful, would offer them boundless wealth.

At the Panipat battle, Babur's guns and fine skills as a commander brought him a well deserved victory which changed the course of Indian history. Humayun, the eldest son of Babur, was dispatched to seize Sultan Ibrahim's household and treasure at Agra while Babur, himself, advanced on Delhi.

Babur was unhappy to find no gardens in India like the ones he had known in Kabul. As soon as Babur arrived in Agra, he selected a site across the river, had a well dug and constructed a bath-house. This was followed by a tank and a pavilion. And soon a Persian garden was laid out that reminded Babur of his northern home.

Babur was well organized with a keen eye for natural beauty of every kind. He was a brave man, humble and good-humored. His attractive personality combined a fine sense of taste and style with boyish gaiety and the obvious virtues of soldier and ruler.

Although Babur's life was occupied with warfare and physical exertion, he enjoyed the company of artists and writers. Babur, himself, has serious literary contributions to his credit. He left to his successors a legacy of artistic sensitivity; a passion for beautiful, artistic objects; an articulate patronage of Persian as well as indigenous artcrafts.



The Mughals were led into India by Babur who had been born in Central Asia in 1483. Babur's victory at Panipat in 1526 established the Mughal Empire and ended the reign of the Delhi Sultanate.

Babur, the new conqueror of Delhi, had been ruler of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, for 20 years. Racially, Babur was a Turk with a thin stream of Mongol blood in his veins; therefore, the term 'Mughal' by which he and his descendants were known in India was really a misnomer. In Persian, the word Mughal, always highly pejorative among the civilized inhabitants of Iran or Mawarannahr, simply means a Mongol. It is clear, however, from Babur's writing that he considered himself a Turk. Although Babur was descended on his mother's side from Chingiz Khan's second son, Chaghatai, it is clear that this Mongol lineage meant less to him than his paternal ancestry which linked him with the great Turkish conqueror, Timur.

Turks boasted high-sounding genealogies from other conquering tribes and clans of Inner Asia, yet they were steeped in Persian traditions of culture and refinements. They delighted in war and the chase; in their skills with bow and scimitar and polo-stick; and in the possession of fine weapons, horses and hunting-falcons.