

# First battle of Panipat Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodhi, foundation of Mughal dynasty

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## Abstract

Panipat has been described as the pivot of Indian history for 300 years. And its story begins in the first great battle of 1526. After the fall of the sayyids, the Afghan Lodi dynasty had seized power at Delhi. The power of the sultanate had decreased considerably at this time, though the sultan could still command significant resources. Ibrahim Lodi, the third ruler, was unpopular with the nobility for his persecution and execution of a large number of old nobles. A prominent noble, Daulat Khan, fearing for his life, appealed to Zahir-ud-din Babur, the Timurid ruler of Kabul, to come and depose Ibrahim Lodi. It was thought that Babur would defeat Lodi, plunder, and leave. Babur, however, had different ideas.

Babur, a Timurid prince with descent from Timur and Chingiz Khan, had originally inherited the kingdom of Fergana— one of the breakaway regions in the aftermath of the breakup of the once mighty Timurid empire. The two foremost powers in the region at this time were the Safavids of Iran and the Uzbeks of Central Asia. Squeezed between them, Babur had to fight for survival. Gaining and losing Samarkand 3 times, he eventually moved to Kabul in 1504, where he aimed to consolidate a power base. It was here that he came into touch with India and between 1504 and 1524 had raided across the Northwestern frontier 4 times. His main goal at this time was to consolidate his position in Afghanistan by crushing the rebellious Pathan tribes of the region, particularly the Yusufzais. Having given up his aspirations of retaking Samarkand in 1512, he now dreamed of a new empire east of the Indus, and bided his time for an opportunity. In the Baburnama, he writes that as these territories were once conquered by Timur, he felt it was his natural birthright and he resolved to acquire them by force if necessary. The invitation of the Afghan chiefs provided him with this opportunity.

Babur reached Panipat on April 12, 1526, and feared an immediate attack by Ibrahim. However, this did not happen. Ibrahim fully understood his advantage, had no intention to attack. His plan was to force Babur to face the Indian summer and cut off his supplies. Certainly, the Indian summer could have done the same thing to Babur as the North Indian winter did to the Marathas in 1761. It was for this reason that Ibrahim refused to be provoked by raids of Babur during the next seven days. This made Babur desperate. His army was on

the verge of loosing heart as he himself admits. On the advice of his "Hindustani well wishers" he sent a raiding party of four to five thousand men against Ibrahim on the night of 18th-19th April.

*Key words: first battle of Panipat, Babur, Ibrahim Lodi, Delhi, India*

### **Introduction**

Babur started for Lahore, Punjab, in 1524 but found that Daulat Khan Lodi had been driven out by forces sent by Ibrahim Lodi. When Babur arrived at Lahore, the Lodi army marched out and was routed. Babur burned Lahore for two days, then marched to Dipalpur, placing Alam Khan, another rebel uncle of Lodi's, as governor. Thereafter he returned to Kabul to gather reinforcements. Alam Khan was quickly overthrown and fled to Kabul. In response, Babur supplied Alam Khan with troops who later joined up with Daulat Khan and together with about 30,000 troops, they besieged Ibrahim Lodi at Delhi. He defeated them and drove off Alam's army, Babur realized Lodi would not allow him to occupy Punjab. Meanwhile Alam also demanded Babur assign Delhi to him after its capture, which was not acceptable to Babur. In 1525 November, Babur set out in force to seize the empire he sought. Crossing the Indus a census of the army revealed his core fighting force numbering 12,000. This number would grow as it joined his garrison in Punjab and some local allies or mercenaries to around 20,000 at Panipat. Entering Sialkot unopposed he moved on to Ambala. His intelligence alerted him that Hamid Khan was about to reinforce Lodi's force with a contingent, he sent his son Humayun to defeat his detachment at Hisar Firoza. From Ambala the army moved south to Shahabad, then east to reach the River Jumna opposite Sarsawa.

At the same time Ibrahim Lodi, Sultan of Delhi, had gathered his army and was advancing slowly north from Delhi, eventually camping somewhere close to Panipat. Late in March 1526 Ibrahim decided to send a small force across the Yamuna into the Doab (the area between the Yamuna and the Ganges). Babur learnt of this when he was two days south of Sarsawa, and decided to send a raiding force across the river to attack this detachment. His right wing had won the victory on 26 February, and so this time he detached his left wing, once again reinforced with part of the centre, so the two armies may have been about the same size. Babur's men crossed the Jumna at midday on 1 April, and advanced south during the afternoon. At day-break on 2 April Babur's men reached the enemy camp. Daud Khan and Hatim Khan would appear to have been caught by surprise and attacked before they could form their men up into a proper line. Babur's men quickly broke their resistance, and chased Ibrahim's men until they were opposite Ibrahim's main camp. Hatim Khan was one of 60-70 prisoners captured, along with 6 or 7 elephants. Just as after the battle on 26 February most of the prisoners were executed, again to send a warning to Ibrahim's men.

After this victory Babur continued to advance south, reaching Panipat on 12 April. Here Babur received news of the apparent huge size of Lodi's army and began to take defensive measures. He was confident in his troops, the core of which were battle-hardened veterans. Joyal friends to him through thick and thin. He also enjoyed a solid rapport with his men and treated them on an equal footing. Any could dine at his table. Ibrahim Lodi however was facing dissension in ranks. He even had to resort to distributing riches to encourage his troops and promised more. Personally brave, Ibrahim was an inexperienced commander and quite vain which upset some of the Afghan nobility. For eight days Both armies stood facing each other without making a decisive move. Finally Babur in an attempt to goad Lodi into attacking him ordered a night raid by 5000 picked horsemen. However the attack faltered badly, and the Mughals narrowly escaped.

Elated by his success, Lodi now advanced to meet Babur's forces on the fields of Panipat.

### **Objective:**

This paper intends to study the causes and consequences of first battle of Panipat led by Babur against Ibrahim Lodi : who founded Mughal Dynasty. \

### **THE AFGHAN SULTANATE ARMY :**

The Delhi sultanate armies had traditionally been based around cavalry. To this the addition was made of the Indian war elephant. The Elephant and horse formed the 2 pillars of sultanate military strength. The army would be based on a quasi-feudal structure. A small central force under the Sultan's direct control at Delhi supplemented by large number of contingents brought by the different Afghan chiefs or Jagirdars, plus Jagirdars (Turkish) and Indian feudal levies and mercenaries (largely infantry). There was no gunpowder artillery and infantry was very much a cannon-fodder force. Ibrahim Lodi was at this time involved in attempts at centralization which was unpopular amongst his chieftains. Ibrahim Lodi's army at Panipat may be estimated at 50,000 men and 400 war elephants. Perhaps 25,000 of these were heavy cavalry predominantly Afghan, rest being feudal levies or mercenaries of less value.

### **Heavy Cavalry**

The Afghans were not a steppe people and thus didn't master horse archery. Rather they relied on heavy shock cavalry as the basis of their military power. Above shows the equipment of an Afghan mailed heavy lancer. To the left is one wearing the standard plate-chainmail hybrid armour of the day. To the right is iron lamellar armour. Both would have been in use, though mail would have predominated. The second picture depicts a typical Afghan mailed lancer in action. They were a redoubtable foe and under Sher Shah proved could easily turn the tables on the Mughals.

Ghulam Armoured cavalry, standard melee cavalry of the delhi sultanate since the time of the ghurids. These would have changed little since the early days of the sultanate except perhaps in armour. Even though the turks were no longer in power at delhi, most jagirdars would be bringing cavalry of similar type. Armed with Shield, lance, Mace and scimitar.

Ibrahim's Primary shock force was his 400+ armoured elephants.

A terrifying shock weapon as well as mobile fortress, used properly they were a formidable problem. They mounted a mahout and 2-3 infantrymen with spears and bows. Against the earlier mongol invasions of the delhi sultanate under the khiljis, the combination of armoured elephants and Sultanate cavalry had proved too much even for the mongols. However this descendant of genghis had something that the earlier chagatai mongols didn't have — Cannons.

### **SULTANATE INFANTRY**

India's humid climate, the impact of archery and the dominating presence of war elephants didn't allow the development of heavily armoured infantry or pikemen in packed formations as in europe. Infantry were very much cannon fodder. Lodi's army would have consisted of several types of infantry, infantry itself being held in low regard during his period.

The afghan chiefs would have brought with them along with their mounted retainers, Pashtun tribal foot infantrymen armed with an assortment of weapons including axes, swords and spears. May or may not be armoured according to wealth. Muslim foot archers armed with the composite bow and a sword. (seen above left) Bumi feudal levies conscripted by the local zamindars/chieftains making up the numbers. Generally no armour, a traditional bamboo longbow (inferior than the composite bow but more durable and easier to obtain) and a broadsword. Mercenaries might have armor.

### **AFGHAN TACTICS :**

The battle formation consisted of the traditional five-fold divisions — the vanguard, the right, the left, the centre and the rear. Sultan stood at the centre with a picked body of cavalry. Skirmishing and night raids were common. The Afghans based their battle tactics around the shock strike forces of their elephants and heavy cavalry. Brute force in massed frontal assaults on the flat plains were therefore key elements of Ibrahim lodi's plan. A considerable part of this army was feudal contingents from the various nobles, they were thus not drilled nor trained to work in co-operation with the whole body, and suffered from lack of maneuverability. They were however well equipped and courageous, if lacking the discipline of the veteran baburids. They also had no understanding of the Tulughma tactics of Central Asia.

## THE MUGHUL 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, 1000. Babur's army at Panipat numbered 15,000-20,000 men.

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

## CAVALRY

Cavalry was the centerpiece of the Mughul army. Babur's horsemen would have been composed of Horse archers - mainly Mongols recruited from Moghulistan in 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. Lamellar armor was in extensive use alongside chainmail-plate hybrid armors (so called 'mirror' armor). First picture on top shows Baburid shock cavalry using lances, swords. They usually wear mailshirts beneath a padded jacket on top. On the right is a light horseman with scimitar. Second picture above shows a cavalryman in lamellar armor and lance on the left, he is fully capable of acting as a horse archer. On the right is pure heavy cavalryman in mail armor (mail more suited to close combat) with straight sword and battle-axe.

A product of steppe warfare, horse archers were the primary cause of the superiority of nomadic armies in the age of cavalry and among the most effective troop types in military history. Though the Afghans had excellent horsemen as well, they relied on heavy mailed cavalry over mounted archers.

They were masters of ambushes, raiding, feigned retreats. The deadliest Mughul weapon was the Turco-Mongol Composite bow. Generally capable of shooting 3 times faster than a matchlock it was in the hands of a veteran horse archer possible to launch volleys of 6 shots in 20 seconds. It was accurate up to 70-100 yards and still dangerous up to 200 yards. Babur employed his horse archers to the flanks and in front of his army as a screen.

At the back - Timurid Horse archer on his mount. Standing in front is a Turkish 'Turkhaan' or hero - an elite Mounted trooper in full body armor and faceplate - usually a member of the commander's bodyguard or a

captain of a unit. In front is an elite infantryman of the guard (Shamshirbaaz) with sword, shield and bow. Babur's cavalry was battle-hardened and well-drilled.

### **INFANTRY**

Babur's infantry was of 2 main types. Footarchers armed with composite bows and a secondary weapon and more importantly Matchlock musketeers. Ratio of archers to matchlockmen was 4:1. Both weapons had about the same effective range of 100 yds. But bowmen had almost 3 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 mantlet as cover when firing the weapon. Matchlockmen in Babur's service were mostly 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 programme 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.

### **MUGHUL TACTICS:**

Babur's tactics at Panipat showed the influence of a mix of 2 military traditions—The Ottoman and the Mongol-Timurid. The use of wagon carts as battlefield defenses was first pioneered by the Hussite rebels of Europe under Jan Zizka, though the Hungarians it was transmitted to the Ottomans who made it the centrepiece of their tactical system—The Tabur Cengi (camp battle). Even previously the Ottomans employed infantry in the centre behind natural defenses to act as a pivot flanked by mobile cavalry wings, an advance guard and a reserve to the rear as demonstrated at Nicopolis. The adoption of the cart-wagon line allowed them to create artificial defenses for their infantry now. These tactics were used to devastating effect vs the Safavids in 1514 and against the Hungarians at Mohacs in 1526. It was through his Turkish gunners that Babur came to be acquainted with this system of battle.

Below—On top the Ottoman Tabur cengi. Boxes with Diagonal shades -Cavalry. Cross shades -Infantry. Light colour indicates light cavalry or infantry. Akinci light cavalry screens Ottoman center deployment, skirmishes the enemy and draws him into attacking the Ottoman centre through harassment and feigned retreats. Infantry and artillery in the centre behind wagon ladder defenses. Irregular Azap infantry on the flanks and Janissaries with muskets in the centre, cannons spread over the wagon line. Sipahis on both wings. These will conduct the main mobile battle looking to outflank the enemy and push him inwards in front

of the janissaries and cannons where they can be mowed down. Generally a reserve of more sipahis to the rear on each wing. Finally the Sultan with his personal household troops -The kapikulu sipahis and a chosen infantry bodyguard as a last reserve. The use of carts in battle is also called Araba.

The tulughma implied dividing a smaller force into subordinate divisions within the traditional divisions for better maneuverability and flexibility. The highly mobile right and left divisions peeled out and surrounded the larger enemy force, especially through employment of flanking parties. The standard Central Asian battle array, or yasal, was divided into four basic parts—the irawul (Harawal) or vanguard, the ghol (Kol) or center, the chadavul or rear guard, and the jaranghar and baranghar—the left and right flanks. During the early expansion of the Turkic and Mongol empires these units were composed almost exclusively of cavalry, but as these states and their rulers became increasingly sedentary, larger numbers of infantry began to appear.

The vanguard was composed primarily of light cavalry and light infantry. It was responsible for scouting and skirmishing. The vanguard acted essentially as a shock absorber for the center, using skirmishing tactics and missile fire to slow and disrupt a frontal assault by enemy heavy cavalry, infantry or elephants. When hard pressed they gradually gave ground and fell back to merge with the main force. Against less aggressive enemies they were tasked with staging harassing attacks followed by feigned retreats designed to lure the opponent into contact with the center and to make them vulnerable to overexertion and flanking maneuvers.

The center was the largest component and included the commander's headquarters and bodyguard. It could in conjunction with the vanguard withstand a frontal assault, fixing the enemy in place for envelopment from the flanks. It was also capable of delivering shock action, either as a first strike or on the counterattack. The rear guard was smaller and could act as a reserve but generally protected the baggage.

## Conclusion

It is often ignored that Babar's career in Central Asia is one of frequent defeats and not of glorious success. He captured and lost Samarqand in 1497 and again in 1501-02. Babar also failed to hold his ancestral kingdom of Farghana. In utter despair and he left for Tashkant which was held by his maternal uncle. In his account of 908 (A.H.) July 7th 1502 to June 26th 1503 (C.E.) Babar writes :

“During my stay at Tashkint I endured poverty and humiliation. No country or hope of one! If I went to my Khan dada's gate, went sometimes with one man, some times with two....., I used to go to Shah Begim, entering her house, bareheaded and barefoot, just as if it were my own(2) .”

Had Ibrahim been sure of the loyalty of his own men, he would have struck to his original plan and forced Babar to retreat. It also makes clear that the mutual distrust of the Afghans played as big a role in their

defeat at Panipat as the guns and Tulghama of Babar. There is every reason to believe that the event could have taken the opposite turn had the Afghans not been a house divided against themselves. Alam Khan who worked against the Afghan cause was ignored after Panipat and Dilawar Khan subsequently died in the prison of Shershah, who expelled from India Humayun, the son and successor of Babar.

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