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RISE AND FALL OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

In the previous lesson you learnt that Babur had laid the foundation of the Mughal Empire by capturing major portion of Northern India. He was a great military leader. Who employed innovative tactics and use of gun powder to build a formidable Army. Fighting in India required adaptation to the new environment which had mountains, forests, marshlands and built up area. Hence it demanded new tactics and diversification and combined arms approach. The Mughals easily adapted to this environment and were prepared to guard against their newly built empire in India.

Babur's successors Humayun, Akbar, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb made great efforts to not only consolidate their empire but also to expand its borders. They had exceptional military as well as administrative skills. In this lesson, let us find out more about the Mughal rule in India.



Objectives

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the Mansabdari System during Akbar's rule;
- explain the nature of war in Second Battle of Panipat;
- highlight the experiences of Akbar's army in battle of Haldighati and
- identify the causes of decline of the Mughals.

8.1 The Mansabdari System

Mansabdari was a system first introduced by Akbar for military administration with the objective of sustaining his army. It was a system originally borrowed from Central Asia but in the Indian context Akbar included Indian Muslims, Rajputs and Afghans as well. The system served as the basis for maintaining Mughal military and civil administration. In this system every man in the Mughal State who was employed above the position of a common soldier (or messenger) became a mansab.

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Note

A Mansab belonged to both civil and military administration and could be transferred from one department to another. In other words it is a position, rank or status within the army.

The mansabdari system was not hereditary. The Mughal officers, whether Hindus or Muslims were granted territorial commands in return for their military service. Each of them had to bring some number of men at arms, horses or elephants to the army and were rated as per the numbers they brought with them.



Do you know?

Mansabdari System is a system of military administration first introduced by Akbar in 1571. He wanted to maintain his army by including Hindus and Muslims and giving them ranks or positions in the military depending upon how many armed men they could bring with them.

The highest mansab that could be held by a subject, not of the royal house, was that of commander of 7000 men. In the later years though, we find instances of promotion to 8000 or even 9000. The mansab of a prince ranged from 7000 up to 50000, and even higher. In the Ain-i-Akbari, sixty-six grades are stated, beginning at commanders of 10000, and ending at those set over 10 men.

In addition to the simple division by mansab alone, there was also a grouping of officers into three classes. They are as follows:

- i. from 20 to 400 were "officers with rank" (mansabdar);
- ii. from 500 to 2500 were Nobles (Amir, pl. Umara);
- iii. from 3000 to 7000 were Great Nobles (Amir-i-Azam)

All mansabdars were kept on either of two lists:

- i. Hazir-i-rikab, present at Court;
- ii. Tainat, on duty elsewhere.

Pay (tankwah) might be either given in cash (naqd); or an assignment of the land revenue (jagir) of a certain number of villages or of a sub-division.

Fines were of various types, such as for

- deficiency in horses (tafawat-i-asp);
- deficiency in equipment (tafawat-i-silah);
- deficiency of troopers (tafawat-i-tabinan) etc.

Other incidents of military service that affected pay and allowances were:

- Absence without leave (ghair-haziri);

- Illness (bimari);
- Leave & furlough (rukhsat);
- Desertion (farari);
- Discharge or resignation (bartarfi);
- Pension;
- Death (fauti).

The Mughals also devised method of honouring with distinctions. They were:

- Titles;
- Robes of Honour;
- Gifts of Money or other articles;
- Kettledrums;
- Standards & Ensigns.

8.2 Second Battle of Panipat

The Second Battle of Panipat marked the beginning of Akbar's rule and also his territorial expansion. It was fought in 1556, between the army of Hem Chandra Vikramaditya (Hemu) and the forces of Akbar. This was during the early phase of dominance of Mughals in India where, their rule was restricted to parts of Punjab, Delhi and Afghan. It was the victory at the second battle that further consolidation and expansion of Mughal empire took place. Akbar's opponent was Hemu who had large forces as compared to Akbar.

- a) Hemu was the Prime Minister of Adil Shah Suri of the Suri Dynasty. He was also known as Hemachandra Vikramaditya. A month before the second battle of Panipat took place, Hemu attacked Delhi and won over Akbar's forces in the Battle of Delhi 1556. He then crowned himself as Samrat Hemachandra Vikramaditya. However, the following month in November 1556 Akbar counter attacked Hemu at Panipat and took over the rule of Delhi.
- b) Thirty years after Babur had defeated Ibrahim Lodi, the Mughal army assembled once again at Panipat under the leadership of Akbar. Ali Quli Khan Shaibani was sent by Akbar with a strong cavalry unit to destroy the train of Hemu's artillery which was weakly guarded. This proved to be a major handicap for Hemu. Although Hemu had lost his artillery to the Mughals even before the actual battle started, his forces were still numerically superior to those of Mughals. Hemu's army was composed of 30,000 strong cavalry and a mighty contingent of 500 elephants. Hemu led his army from the front, atop an elephant named Hawaii. The Mughal military formation was on the traditional lines with left and right flanks and vanguard assisting the centre. There were at least 10,000 horses



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in the cavalry of Mughals. Akbar and Bairam Khan stayed in the rear of their forces, 8 miles from the battleground. Panipat witnessed another fierce battle which echoes the maxim that 'numerical superiority no guarantee to attain victory in wars', rather it is battlefield tactics that matters.

Aftermath

In the battle Hemu was wounded by a stray arrow and captured. Later, Akbar's regent, Bairam Khan beheaded Hemu. After the Second Battle of Panipat, the victors occupied Delhi and Agra and the sovereignty of Akbar over Delhi was confirmed.



Do you know?

The word Sovereignty is derived from the Latin word 'superanus' which means supreme. It therefore means supreme power or authority to govern.



Intext Questions

8.1

1. How were the Mansabs honoured?
2. When was the second battle of Panipat fought?
3. Who were the opposing forces?

8.3 The Battle of Haldighati

The battle of Haldighati was another historic battle fought during the rule of Akbar in June 1576. It was fought between the ruler of Mewar in Rajasthan, Rana Pratap Singh and Raja Man Singh of Amber who was a great military general of Akbar. Soon after the second battle of Panipat, one by one, all the Rajput kings acknowledged Akbar's supremacy except Rana Udai Singh of Mewar who refused to accept Akbar's supremacy and decided to defend Chittor, his main fortress and capital. Akbar attacked Chittor with a huge army of 40,000 which had guns and muskets while Chittor was defended by 8,000 Rajputs who were ill equipped.

There were large numbers of civilians also in the fort. The fortress fell after a heroic battle in which the Rajputs fought to the last man while their women folk performed collective self-immolation. With the loss of Chittor, Mewar had lost the fertile part of its kingdom to the Mughals. Besides, the unsuccessful battle at Chittor led to loss of the treasury crippling its resource and also demoralizing the fighting ranks. But the next ruler of Mewar, Rana Pratap Singh fought again with Akbar at Haldighati.

- a) **Maharana Rana Pratap Singh** : Rana Pratap Singh was born in 1540 and was given military training and became an excellent rider and expert swordsman. He ascended the throne of Mewar in 1572. Rana Pratap stood alone and was in no position to challenge the might of Mughal Empire under a capable king like Akbar. Akbar tried to win over Rana Pratap by offering him a position in his

court provided he became his vassal. But Rana Pratap rejected this offer. Akbar therefore decided to defeat Rana Pratap when all other diplomatic efforts failed to subdue him. Some important points about Rana Pratap's preparation to fight Akbar were as follows:-

- Rana Pratap took necessary measures to prepare for the coming Mughal invasion. To start with, he established himself in the western hills and forests of his kingdom. He selected the rock fortress of Kumbalgarh as his new capital. He strengthened his fort of Gogunda, north-west of Udaipur and made it his forward base. He remodeled his government and organised it to conduct a long-lasting campaign against the superior Mughal army.
- Pratap toured every village of his state and impressed upon his people the necessity of unity and sacrifice to face the impending danger. Pratap did not believe that only one caste should fight. He felt this was an obsolete concept. He therefore registered the support of not only the martial Kshatriya caste but of all other castes including the aboriginals, known as Bhils of Rajasthan.
- On his part, Akbar wanted to subdue Rana Pratap before his ideas could influence other Rajput kings. Akbar selected Raja Man Singh to lead the Mughal army against Rana Pratap.

b) **The Battle** : Pratap wanted to select the ground of his own choice where his small army could fight the Mughal army with some tactical advantage. He selected the area of Haldi Ghati pass, which was not only a hilly terrain but had a lot of thorny bushes and trees to provide necessary cover. The area of Haldi Ghati also provided an easy exit for Pratap's small army in case of defeat. The troop strength and organisation for battle were as under:-

- According to Mughal court historian Abdul Qadir Badayuni, Pratap's army had approximately 3,000 cavalry. Pratap had perhaps 3000 to 4000 cavalry, some elephants and about 3,000 Bhil infantry men who were also good in use of bow. Pratap's army had neither guns nor muskets.
- The Mughals had approximately 16,000 cavalry, 8,000 infantry, elephant corps and guns, with overall strength of about 28,000 troops. It was organised on the same lines as that of Babur's force.
- The Mughal army deployed with skirmishers holding the front line, behind which was deployed the vanguard. Then came the powerful centre while the flanks were protected by strong contingents deployed on the left as well as the right wings. In the rear were the mobile enveloping contingents who were used to attack the flanks and rear of the enemy army.



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- Pratap's small army had a vanguard while the remainder army was divided into left, centre and right wings. He had deployed Bhils, his infantry, to guard the pass from both the flanks. The battle was fought on 18th January, 1576. Pratap took the initiative and started the attack. Before long, Pratap's army was decimated and this unequal contest ended.

c) **Aftermath** : Rana Pratap's army had suffered crippling losses and most of its gallant chiefs had been killed. The blood of Mewar had irrigated the soil of Haldi Ghati. The strategic route to Gujrat from Delhi was secured.

Akbar expected that either Pratap would be captured or killed during the battle. But Pratap had managed to escape after offering a firm resistance where his personal valour had won the hearts of all his followers.

So, from Akbar's point of view, battle of Haldighati was a barren victory, as Pratap continued the struggle to the bitter end, and Akbar had to mount further expeditions to crush Rana Pratap, but without success.

8.4 Causes of Downfall of Mughals

There are several causes for the decline of the Mughal rule in India. They are as follows:

- An open country was a pre-requisite for success of Mughal army, for without this their cavalry could not be deployed effectively. In a mountainous terrain, they were at a terrible disadvantage.
- The army became, in effect, a body of mercenaries who served for personal gains, and were ever ready to desert when things went bad. There was no discipline in the military.
- While Mansabdari system was the key to the structure of Mughal administrative setup, it had its own disadvantages in the army. Each man had so much to lose and so very little to gain, for example, a cavalier rode his own horse, and if it was killed in action, the compensations were disproportionate.
- The most critical point of a battle was the death or disappearance of the leader. The troops lacked discipline and determination; and were subject to panic and sudden flight.



Intext Questions

8.2

1. When was the battle of Haldighati fought and who were the opposing forces?
2. What was the outcome of the battle?



What You Have Learnt

- Mansabdari system was founded by Akbar.
- This system evolved to solidify honorary distinctions for the Mughal warriors. However, despite consolidating power, Akbar was forced to encounter another battle at Panipat for the second time during which the sovereignty over Delhi was established.
- Another aspect is that there was continuous struggle against the Mughals by the Rajputs. Rana Pratap, the gallant son of Udai Singh, dared to oppose the mighty Mughal emperor of India, even after the defeat of Chittor.
- Pratap continued his struggle against the Mughals even after Akbar's barren victory in Haldighati.
- The Mansabdari system which was the source of strength for the Mughal administration proved to be the cause of downfall of the Mughal military structure.



Terminal Exercises

1. What do you understand by the Mansabdari system?
2. Write a short note on the second battle of Panipat.
3. What were the tactics employed by the Mughals at the battle of Haldighati?
4. Mention the causes for the downfall of the Mughals



Answers to in Intext Questions

8.1

1. Titles, Robes of Honor and Gifts
2. October 1556
3. Akbar and Hemu

8.2

1. June 1576 between Akbar and Maharana Rana Pratap Singh
2. Akbar won the battle

Module - II

Military History of Medieval India



Note

