

## **The Baburid Empire: Military Reforms That Became the Basis of Victory**

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the military system of the Baburid Empire, which emerged in India in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the reforms that played a key role in its development. Specifically, it explores the strategic importance of artillery and firearms used by Babur, using the Battle of Panipat in 1526 as an example. The military superiority of the Baburid Empire is primarily explained by the effective use of modern military technology, the formation of a centralized army system, and the combination of traditional and new methods of warfare. It is also established that these reforms laid the foundation for a radical overhaul of the military system in India and the formation of a large centralized state.

**Keywords:** Zahriddin Muhammad Babur, the Baburid Empire, Akbar Shah's "gunpowder empires," military reforms, military strategy, firearms, artillery.

### **Introduction**

The 16th and 17th centuries are particularly significant in world history as a period of fundamental changes in the military sphere. During this period, the systematic use of gunpowder, firearms, and artillery led to significant changes in military strategy and tactics. In particular, military reforms were a key factor in quickly transforming the Baburid Empire, founded by Zahriddin Muhammad Babur in India, into a large and centralized empire.[1]

As an experienced commander of his time, Babur was able to combine traditional methods of warfare with modern military technology. The artillery, firearms, and new tactics and strategies he employed were fundamentally different from the military system existing in India. As a result, it became possible to achieve victories over numerically superior armies.[2]

The Babur Empire, founded by Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, was formed not only by political stability but also by a robust military system. Although Babur is known for his scholarly legacy, his military talent and military reforms were a significant factor in the creation of the empire. Particularly in India, victories over powerful and numerically superior opponents were the result of Babur's new military approach.[3]

### **Research Methods**

The widespread use of firearms and cannons in Babur's empire was one of the most important innovations in the military system. The primary source was Babur's work, the Baburnama. At the same time, extensive information on the military reforms carried out by the Baburs can be found in Abu Fazil's Akbarnama.[4] The works of Marshall Hodgson and Kenneth Chase were used as secondary sources. Several articles by Indian historians on the history of Babur's era were also reviewed and incorporated into the analysis. Their research provided a theoretical justification for the concept of "gunpowder empires" and military reforms. These sources were studied using text and contextual analysis.[5]

### **Result and Discussion**

For example, the Baburnome records that Alikuli was ordered to build a "large cannon" (zambarak) to bombard Bayana and other fortresses. In this case, furnaces were built around the cannon casting and smelting area.[6] A separate vat was dug from the bottom of each furnace, corresponding to

the mold in which the cannon was cast. Holes were made in the furnaces, and the molten weapon from each vat was poured into the mold. The stone ejected from it rose to a height of up to six hundred steps.[7]

The Baburians are known to have used cannons and rifles in the Battle of Panipat in 1526. The fact that the Baburians used cavalry, artillery, and large infantry in this battle indicates that the Baburians integrated the military traditions of the time. The Battle of Panipat is notable for the fact that Babur, with an army of approximately twenty-five thousand men, routed an army of one hundred thousand soldiers and a thousand elephants.[8] Therefore, this battle is considered more important militarily than politically. Babur defended one wing of his army with the city of Panipat, which was filled with houses, and the other with a ditch filled with tree branches. In front of it, he tied together numerous wagons, creating a barrier that served as a defensive wall. Special beams—parapets—were installed between the wagons to allow soldiers to fire their weapons. Babur called this military method the "Ottoman method" because it was used by the Ottomans in their famous battle against Shah Ismail of Iran. The fact that Babur's army initially relied on cavalry tactics led to its rapid adoption.[9]

Babur organized his army as a centralized and disciplined force. The main areas of reform were the division of military units into specific tasks, the strengthening of the command structure, and the reinforcement of discipline and subordination. This served to ensure the rapid and effective administration of the army.[10] The artillery consisted of two very skillfully organized sections. The first section consisted of heavy cannons used for the defense or attack of fortresses, while the second, in contrast, was light artillery that was easy and convenient to transport. According to the Indian historian S. Chandra, the Baburians devoted great attention to improving their artillery, and initially, many Ottomans and Portuguese served in the artillery department. By the time of Aurangzeb, the Baburid artillery had developed significantly, and it became difficult for foreigners to find work in the artillery department.[11]

In foreign literature, the use of gunpowder cannons in military affairs is referred to as the period of the "Gunpowder Empires" from 1503 to 1789. [2, p. 96]. The term "gunpowder empires" is used by the Russian historian V. Bartold to designate two empires that were the first to use gunpowder and firearms. In the mid-20th century, the American historian Marshall Goodwin Sims Hodgson added the Safavids to this list of empires and expanded on this theory. According to him, strong centralized states capable of producing and using firearms had an advantage over local units and small political forces[12].

Thus, the 16th-17th centuries are explained as the period when gunpowder, firearms, and artillery began to be systematically used in military technology. The era of the Baburs, the Ottoman Empire, and the Safavid Empire are mentioned. The Baburs were the first to use gunpowder during their attack on the fortress of Bhira. According to available data, gunpowder was known in India earlier, but its widespread use for artillery purposes became popular in Northern India with the arrival of the Baburs. Before Babur, artillery had not become widespread in India, and cavalry and elephants were primarily used in battle. This suggests that the Baburs utilized military technology effectively.[13]

The skillful use of artillery and cavalry led Babur to a number of victories. For example, in March 1527, Babur fought against Rana Sanga. Initially, his artillery completely routed the attack of the Rajput cavalry and elephants. The sound of their cannons greatly frightened the animals, unaccustomed to such sounds. Even the elephants trampled the Rajput soldiers themselves. As a result, gunpowder and artillery became popular in India. Since artillery was very expensive, its use benefited rulers with ample financial resources. The era of petty kingdoms in India began to come to an end.[14]

During the reign of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar, the military was also organized in a disciplined and effective manner. During his reign, the Dakhsala system was established to provide soldiers with regular wages and continuous training. It was considered a central personnel department, and its roster included infantrymen, cattle drivers, and other similar workers. While the empire's

standing army and soldiers in the Dakhila system were primarily supplied from state depots, officials and other officers were typically required to purchase necessary equipment for themselves and their troops in private markets. A portion of their salaries was allocated for this purpose.[15]

### Conclusion

The consolidation and long-term rule of the Babur dynasty in India was, above all, closely linked to thoughtful and consistently implemented military reforms. The centralized military system established by Babur, the effective use of modern artillery, war elephants, a disciplined army, and mobile light artillery ensured Babur's superior military potential. Subsequent rulers continued this tradition and introduced significant technical and organizational innovations in the military sphere. In particular, the improvement of artillery and the development of local specialists strengthened the military independence of Babur's state. As a result, the Baburian dynasty became one of the most powerful empires in the region, possessing not only military might but also a stable political system.

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