

UPSC
Old NCERT Summary (Bipan Chandra)
Mughal Empire- 1

INTRODUCTION

- WHEN HUM AYUN was retreating from Bikaner, he was gallantly offered shelter and help by the Rana of Amarkot. It was at Amarkot, in 1542, that Akbar, the greatest of the Mughal rulers, was born. When Humayun died, Akbar was at Kalangaur in the Punjab, commanding operations against the Afghan rebels there. He was crowned at Kalanaur in 1556 at the young age of thirteen years and four months.
- Akbar succeeded to a difficult position. The Afghans were still strong beyond Agra, and were regrouping their forces under the leadership of Hemu for a final showdown. Kabul had been attacked and besieged. Sikandar Sur, the defeated Afghan ruler, was loitering in the Siwalik Hills, However, Bairam Khan, the tutor of the prince and a loyal and favourite officer of Humayun, rose to the occasion. He became the wakil of the kingdom, with the title of Khan-i-Khanan and rallied the Mughal forces. The threat from the side of Hemu was considered the most serious. Adil Shah had appointed him the wazir with the title of Vikramajit, and entrusted him with the task of expelling the Mughals. Hemu captured Agra, and with an army of 50,000 cavalry, 500 elephants and a strong park of artillery marched upon Delhi.
- In a well-contested battle, Hemu defeated the Mughals near Delhi and occupied the city. However, Bairam Khan took energetic steps to meet the situation. His bold stand put new heart into battle between the Mughals and the Afghan forces led by Hemu, took place once again at Panipat (5 November 1556). Although Hemu's artillery had been captured earlier by a Mughal detachment, the tide of battle was in favour of Hemu when an arrow hit him in the eye and he fainted, the leaderless Afghan army was defeated, Hemu was captured and executed.

EARLY PHASE-CONTEST WITH THE NOBILITY (1556-67)

- Bairam Khan remained at the helm of affairs of the empire for almost four years. During the period, he kept the nobility fully under control. Meanwhile, Akbar was approaching the age of maturity. Bairam Khan

had offended many powerful persons while he held supreme power. There was friction on small points which made Akbar realise that he could not leave the affairs of the state in someone else's hands for any length of time.

- Akbar played his cards deftly. He left Agra on the pretext of hunting, and reached Delhi. From Delhi he issued a farman dismissing Bairam Khan from his office, and calling upon all the nobles to come and submit to him personally. Once Bairam Khan realised that Akbar wanted to take power in his own hands, he was prepared to submit, but his opponents were keen to ruin him. They heaped humiliation upon him till he was goaded to rebel. Finally, Bairam Khan was forced to submit. Akbar received him cordially, and gave him the option of serving at the court or anywhere outside it or retiring to Mecca.
- Bairam Khan chose to go to Mecca. However, on his way, he was assassinated at Patau near Ahmedabad by an Afghan who bore him a personal grudge. Bairam's wife and a young child were brought to Akbar at Agra. Akbar married Bairam Khan's widow who was his cousin, and brought up the child as his own son. This child later became famous as Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan and held some of the most important offices and commands in the empire. During Bairam Khan's rebellion, groups and individuals in the nobility had become politically active. They included Akbar's foster-mother, Maham Anaga, and her relations.
- Though Maham Anaga soon withdrew from politics, her son, Adham Khan was an impetuous young man who assumed independent airs when sent to command an expedition against Malwa. Removed from the command, he laid claim to the post of the wazir, and when this was not conceded, he stabbed the acting wazir in his office. Akbar was enraged and had him thrown down from the parapet of the fort so that he died (1561). Between 1561 and 1567 they broke out in rebellion several times, forcing Akbar to take the field against them. Each time Akbar was induced to pardon them. When they again rebelled in 1565, Akbar was so exasperated that he vowed to make Jaunpur his capital till he had rooted them out. Meanwhile, a rebellion by the Mirzas, who were Timurids and were related to Akbar by marriage, there the areas west of modern Uttar Pradesh into confusion. Encouraged by these rebellions, Akbar's half-brother, Mirza Hakim, who had seized control of Kabul, advanced into the Punjab, and besieged Lahore. The Uzbek rebels formally proclaimed him their ruler.

EARLY EXPANSION OF THE EMPIRE (1560-76)

- Following Bairam Khan's regency, the territories of the Mughal empire had been expanded rapidly. Apart from Ajme, important conquests during this period captured earlier were that of Malwa and Gharh-Katanga. Malwa was being ruled, at that time, by a young prince, Baz Bahadur. The expedition against Malwa was led by Admam Khan, son of Akbar's foster-mother, Maham Anaga. Baz Bahadur was badly defeated (1561) and the Mughals took valuable spoils, including Rupm-ati. However, she preferred to commit suicide to being dragged to Adham Khan's karem. Due to the senseless cruelties of Adham Khan and his successor, there was a reaction against the Mughals which enabled Baz Bahadur to recover Malwa.
- After dealing with Bairam Khan's rebellion, Akbar sent another expedition to Malwa. Baz Bahadur had to flee, and for some time he took shelter with the Rana of Mewar. After wandering about from one area to another, he finally repaired to Akbar's court and was enrolled as a Mughal mansabdar. The extensive country of Malwa thus came under Mughal rule. At about the same time, Mughal arms overran the kingdom of Gharh-Katanga. The kingdom of Garh-Katanga included the Narmada valley and the northern portions, of present Madhya Pradesh. It had been welded together by one Aman Das who flourished in the second half of the fifteenth century. Aman Das had helped Bahadur Shah of Gujarat in the conquest of Raisen and had received from him the title of Sangram Shah.
- The kingdom of Ghar-Katanga included a number of Gond and Rajput principalities. It was the most powerful kingdom set up by the Gonds. We do not know, however, to what extent these figures are dependable. Sangram Shah had further strengthened his position by marrying off his son to a princess of the famous Chandella rulers of Mahoba. This princess, who is famous as Durgavati, became a widow soon afterwards. But she installed her minor son on the throne and ruled the country with great vigour and courage.
- Meanwhile, the cupidity of Asaf Khan, the Mughal governor of Allahabad, was roused by the stories of the fabulous wealth and the beauty of the Rani. Asaf Khan advanced with 10,000 cavalry from the side of Bundelkhand. Some of the semi-independent rulers of Garha found it a convenient moment to throw off the Gond yoke. The Rani was thus left with a small force. Though wounded, she fought on gallantly. Finding that the battle was lost and that she was in danger of being captured, she stabbed herself to death. Asaf Khan then stormed the capital, Chauragarh, near modern Jabalpur. Out of all the plunder Asaf Khan sent

- only two hundred elephants to the court, and retained all the rest for himself." Kamaladevi, the younger sister of Rani, was sent to the court.
- When Akbar had dealt with the rebellion of the Uzbek nobles he forced Asaf Khan to disgorge his illegal gains. He restored the kingdom of Garh-Katanga to Chandra Shah, the younger son of Sangram Shah, after taking ten forts to round off the kingdom of Malwa.
 - During the next ten years, Akbar brought the major part of Rajasthan under his control and also conquered Gujarat and Bengal. A major step in his campaign against the Rajpur states was the siege of Chittor.

Chittor fell (1568) after a gallant siege of six months. At the advice of his nobles, Rana Udai Singh had retired to the hills leaving the famous warriors, Jaimal and Patta, in charge of the fort. The rajput warriors died after extracting as much vengeance as possible. In honour of the gallant Jaimal and Patta, Akbar ordered that two stone statues of these warriors, seated on elephants, be erected outside the chief gate of the fort at Agra.

- The fall of Chittor was followed by the conquest of Ranthambhor reputed to be the most powerful fortress in Rajasthan. Jodhpur had been conquered earlier. As a result of these victories, most of the Rajpur rajas, including those of Bikaner and Jaisalmer, submitted to Akbar. Only Mewar continued to resist.
- In 1572, Akbar advanced on Ahmedabad via Ajmer. Ahmedabad surrendered without a fight. Akbar then turned his attention to the Mirzas who held Broach, Baroda and Surat. At Cambay, Akbar saw the sea for the first time and rode on it in boat. A group of Portuguese merchants also came and met him for the first time. The Portuguese dominated the Indian seas by this time, and had ambition of establishing an empire in India. Akbar's conquest of Gujarat frustrated these designs.
- While Akbar's armies were besieging Surat, Akbar crossed the river Mahi and assaulted the Mirzas with a small body of 200 men which included Man Singh and Bhagwan Das of Amber. For some time, Akbar's life was in danger. But the impetuosity of his charge routed the Mirzas. Thus, Gujarat came under Mughal control. However, as soon as Akbar had turned his back, rebellions broke out all over Gujarat. Hearing the news, Akbar marched out of Agra and traversed across Rajasthan in nine days by means of camels, horses and carts. On the eleventh day, he reached Ahmedabad. In this journey, which normally took six weeks, only 3000 soldiers were able to keep up with Akbar. With these he defeated an enemy force of 20,000 (1573).
- After this, Akbar turned his attention to Bengal. The Afghans had continued to dominate Bengal and Bihar. Internal fights among the

Afghans, and the declaration of independence by the new ruler, Daud Khan, gave Akbar the opportunity he was seeking. In a stiff battle in Bihar in 1576, Daud Khan was defeated and executed on the spot.

- Thus ended the last Afghan kingdom in northern India. It also brought to an end the first phase of Akbar's expansion of the empire.

ADMINISTRATION

- During the decade following the conquest of Gujarat, Akbar found time to look at the administrative problems of the empire.
- One of the most important problems facing Akbar was the system of land revenue administration. Sher Shah had instituted a system by which the cultivated area was measured and a crop rate (ray) was drawn up, fixing the dues of the peasant crop-wise on the basis of the productivity of land. Akbar adopted Sher Shah's system. But it was soon found that the fixing of central schedule of prices often led to considerable delays, and resulted in great hardships to the peasantry.
- Akbar, therefore, reverted to a system of Annual assessment. The quangos, who were hereditary holders of land as well as local officials conversant with local conditions, were ordered to report on the actual produce, state of cultivation, local prices, etc. After returning from Gujarat (1573), Akbar paid personal attention to the land revenue system. Officials called karoris were appointed all over north India. They were responsible for the collection of a crore of dams (Rs 2,50,000), and also checked the facts and figures supplied by the quangos. On the basis of the information provided by them regarding the actual produce, local prices, productivity, etc., in 1580, Akbar instituted a new system called the dahsala.
- Under this system, the average produce of different crops as well as the average prices prevailing over the last ten years were calculated. One third of the average produce was the state share. The state demand was, however, stated in cash. This was done by converting the state share into money on the basis of a schedule of average prices over the past ten years. Thus, the produce of a bigha of land under share was given in manunds. But on the basis of average prices, the state demand was fixed in rupees per bigha.
- There were number of advantages of this system. As soon as the area sown by the peasant had been measured by means of the bamboos linked with iron rings, the peasants as well as the state knew what the dues were.
- The peasant was given remission in the land revenue if crops failed on account of drought, floods, etc. The system of measurement and the assessment based upon it is called the zabti system. Akbar introduced

this system in the area from Lahore to Allahabad, and in Malwa and Gujarat. The dah salaw system was a further development of the zabti system.

- A number of other systems of assessment were also followed under Akbar. The most common and, perhaps, the oldest was called batai or ghalla-bakhshi. In this system, the produce was divided between the peasants and the state in fixed proportion. The crop was divided after it had been thrashed, or when it had been cut and tied in stacks, or while it was standing in the field.
- A third system which was widely used in Akbar's time was nasaq. It seems that it meant a rough calculation of the amount payable by the peasant on the basis of what he had been paying in the past. It is also called kankut.
- Land which remained under cultivation almost every year was called polaj. When it remained uncultivated it was called parati (fallow). Parati land paid at the full (polaj) rate when it was cultivated. Land which had been fallow for two to three years was called chachar, and if longer than that, banjar.
- The dahsala was not a ten-year settlement. Nor was it a permanent one, the state retaining the right to modify it. However, with some changes, Akbar's settlement remained the basis of the land revenue system of the Mughal empire till the end of the seventeenth century. The zabti system is associated with Raja Todar Mal and is sometimes called Todar mal's bandobast.

Todar Mal was a brilliant revenue officer who had first served under Sher Shah. But he was only one of a team of brilliant revenue officials who came to the forefront under Akbar.

ORGANISATION OF GOVERNMENT

- Hardly any changes were made by Akbar in the organisation of local government. The pargana and the sarkar continued as before. The chief officers of the sarkar were the faujdar and the amalguzar, the former being in charge of law and order, and the latter responsible for the assessment and collection of the land revenue. The territories of the empire were divided into jagir, khalisa and inam. Income from khalisa villages went directly to the royal exchequer. The inam lands were those which were allotted to learned and religious men. The amalguzar was required to exercise a general supervision over all types of holdings so that the imperial rules and regulations for the assessment and collection

of land revenue were followed uniformly. Even there, Akbar encouraged them to follow the imperial system.

- Akbar paid great attention to the organisation of the central and provincial governments. His system of central government was based on the structure of government which had evolved under the Delhi Sultanat, but the functions of the various departments were carefully reorganised, and meticulous rules and regulations were laid down for the conduct of affairs. Thus, he gave a new shape to the system and breathed new life into it.
- The Central Asian and Timurid tradition was of having an all-powerful wazir under whom various heads of departments functioned. He was the principal link between the ruler and the administration. In course of time, a separate department, the military department, had come into being. The judiciary had always been separate. Thus, in practice, the concept of an all-powerful wazir had been given up. However, in his capacity as wakil, Bairam Khan had exercised the power of an all-powerful wazir.
- Akbar reorganised the central machinery of administration on the basis of the division of power between various departments, and of checks and balances. While the post of wakil was not abolished, it was stripped of all power and became largely decorative. The head of the revenue department continued to be the wazir. He was not generally a person who held a high position in the nobility. Many nobles held mansabs which were higher than his. Thus, he was no longer the principal adviser to the ruler, but an expert in revenue affairs. To emphasise this point, Akbar generally used the title of diwan or divan-i-ala in preference to the word wazir. Sometimes, several persons were asked to discharge the duties of diwan jointly. The diwan was responsible for all income and expenditure, and held control over khalisa, jagir and inam lands.
- The head of the military department was called the mir bakhshi. It was the mir bakhshi and not the diwan who was considered the head of the nobility. Therefore, only the leading grandees were appointed to this post.

Recommendations for appointment to mansabs or for promotions, etc. were made to the emperor through the mir bakhshi. Once the emperor had accepted a recommendation, it was sent to the diwan for confirmation and for assigning a jagir to the appointee. The same procedure was followed in case of promotions.

- The mir bakhshi was also the head of the intelligence and information agencies of the empire. Intelligence officers (barids) and news reporters (waqia-navis) were posted to all parts of the empire. There

reports were presented to the emperor at the court through the mir bakhshi.

- It will thus be seen that the diwan and the mir bakhshi were almost on a par with, and supported and checked, each other.
- The third important officer was the mir saman. He was in charge of the imperial household, including the supply of all the provisions and articles for the use of the inmates of the harem or the female apartments. The maintenance of etiquette at the court, the control of the royal bodyguard, etc, were all under the overall supervision of this officer.
- The fourth important department was the judicial department headed by the chief qazi. It fell in to bad odour due to the corruption and venality of Akbar's chief qazi, Abdun Nabi.