

## THE FOUNDATION OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

(FROM BABAR TO AKBAR – 1526 TO 1605)

In the previous chapters we learned how the Turk sultans defeated powerful and small kings to establish a large sultanate in Delhi. The Delhi Sultanate ruled India for about 200 years. Its last dynasty was the Lodhi dynasty, which was weak. As a result, the country was again divided into many small kingdoms.

### Babar (1526-1530)

Babar was the founder of the Mughal Empire in India. When he was 13 years old, he inherited the small principality of Farghana in Central Asia from his father. He was young and inexperienced so his opponents drove him out of Farghana. He tried many times to recapture his kingdom, but failed. So he turned his attention to Kabul, conquering the kingdom and establishing his rule there. He then tried to expand his empire but he could not defeat the kings of Central Asia. At that time, north India was divided into many small kingdoms ruled by Rajput kings. The Delhi Sultanate was ruled by the Lodhi sultans. One of its governors in Punjab, Daulat Khan, wanted to overthrow Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi so he invited Babur to invade Delhi.

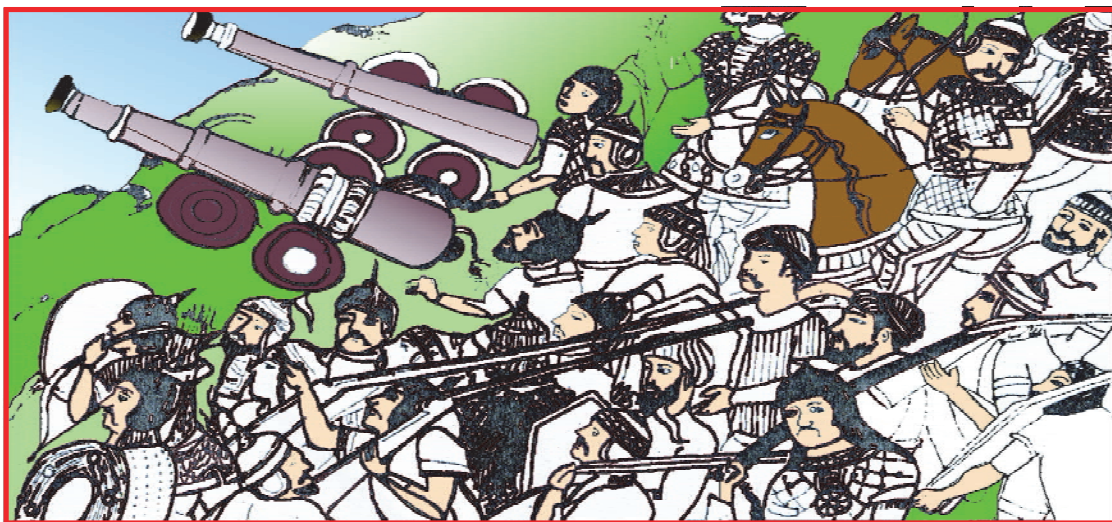


Fig.: 6.1 The Army of Babar

In this picture of the army, can you identify some new weapons coming to India at that period.

Babur fought Ibrahim Lodi on the battlefield of Panipat in 1526. Although his army was small Babur was a good general and his soldiers were well trained and experienced in warfare. They had guns and cannons which the Indian ruler did not possess. His cavalrymen were also good archers. Babur's army was thus able to defeat the army of the Delhi sultan.

After the battle, Babur's generals wanted to loot the wealth of the Delhi Sultanate and return to Kabul, but he wanted to stay back and establish an empire. He defeated several other smaller kings and annexed their kingdoms to his growing empire.

### **Babar and Rana Sanga**

In those days Rana Sanga was the Rajput king of Mewar. He tried to stop Babur's advance and many Rajput chiefs and Afghan nobles joined him in battle. Rana Sanga was an experienced and heroic leader who headed an army that was much bigger than Babur's. When they saw the Rajputs preparing for battle, Babur's soldiers were demoralized. They did not want to face the Rajput army. Babur tried to raise their morale. He took a vow to give up drinking. He also gave a stirring speech: "My brave warriors, all of us who are born in this world have to die one day. Fight with courage. If we win we can establish an empire. If we die in battle, we die as martyrs. To die with honour is better than to live in disgrace."

Fired by his speech, Babur's soldiers inflicted a crushing defeat on Rana Sanga at the battlefield of Khanua in 1527. With all his powerful opponents vanquished, Babur was able to establish the Mughal Empire in Delhi.

He was fond of gardens and had several gardens in the Mughal style laid out across his kingdom. He also wrote a detailed account of his life experiences in his autobiography. Written in Turkish under the title *Tuzuk-i-Babari*, it is popularly known as *Babarnama*.

1. What did Babur's army possess that Sultan Ibrahim Lodi's army did not have?
2. Why did Babur decide to build an empire in India? What do you think were his reasons?
3. Babur faced a greater threat from Rana Sanga than from Ibrahim Lodi. Why?

### **Humayun (1530-1556)**

After Babur's death his eldest son Humayun ascended the throne. He found it difficult to govern the territories captured by his father. He did not get

any support from his brothers and the Sultan of Gujarat. The Rajput kings and Afghan nobles also opposed him. Humayun was able to capture Malwa and Gujarat but he could not establish his control over eastern India. He was defeated by Sher Shah, the Afghan *sardar* of this region, and was forced to flee from India.

Humayun wandered around for 15 years and was given shelter by the Shah of Iran. He recaptured Delhi in 1555 with the Shah's help and re-established Mughal rule in Delhi. But he died in 1556 when he slipped on the stairs of his library in Purana Qila in Delhi.

### **Sher Shah (1540-1545)**

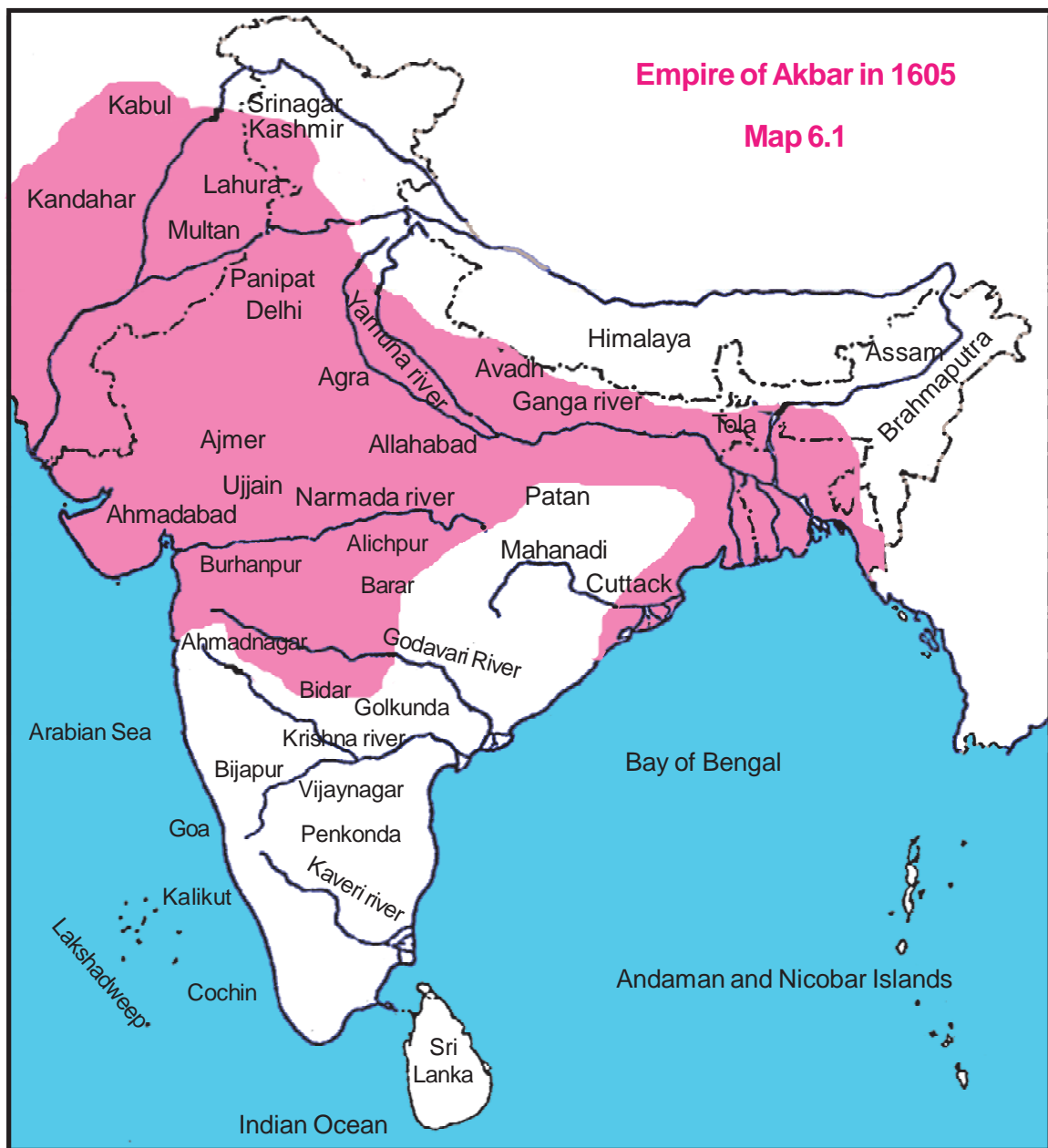
Sher Shah was an Afghan *amir* from Bihar. He was the son of the Afghan *jagirdar* of Sasaram in Bihar. He defeated several big and small Rajput and Afghan *jagirdars*.



**Figure: 6.2 Tomb of Shershah Suri, Sasaram, Bihar**

Sher Shah introduced many reforms to strengthen his kingdom. He paid special attention to constructing roads and building rest houses and jails. One of his officials, Raja Todarmal, assisted him in several land reclamation projects. He also introduced new currency, including copper coins known as *dam* and silver coins known as *rupaiya*. Many of these reforms were later adopted by Akbar.

Sher Shah built a large mausoleum for himself at Sasaram. He did not rule for long, dying in battle in 1545 while attacking the Kalinjar fort.



### Akbar (1556-1605)

When Humayun died, his son Akbar was a young boy like all of you. But Bairam Khan, one of Humayun's trusted officers, crowned him king. This was an enormous responsibility for the young Akbar. He ruled with the help and guidance of Bairam Khan until he reached adulthood. After that he took over the reins of his empire and ruled it successfully till his death.



## Empire expansion

Akbar wanted to establish a huge empire, so he began invading neighbouring kingdoms. He won many battles and captured many kingdoms in a short span of time - Malwa in 1561, Gondwana in 1564, Chittor in 1568, Gujarat in 1572 and Bengal in 1574. Continuing his campaign from 1586 to 1600, he annexed Kashmir, Sindh, Kandhar and Orissa as well as the southern kingdoms of Berar, Ahmednagar, and Khandesh in the Deccan.

Locate these areas in map 6.1

Akbar wanted to build an empire in which important and powerful people from all over India and all walks of life could contribute. In the beginning, all his senior officers and generals were people from Iran or Turkey. He began appointing Indian Muslims to these posts, especially those belonging to the families of sufi saints and Afghan *zamindars*. He also wanted to appoint the defeated Rajput kings as officials in his empire, so he extended his hand in friendship towards them. He promised to return their kingdoms if they accepted his suzerainty. He promised them high posts, saying there would be no discrimination on the basis of religion.

He married several Rajput princesses to strengthen his alliances with the Rajput kings. The princesses were free to follow their religion even after marriage. He helped Raja Bharmal of the Kachwaha dynasty of Amer, near Jaipur, by appointing his son Bhagwan Das and grandson Mansingh to high ranks in his service. Raja Bharmal gave his daughter's hand in marriage to Akbar. These matrimonial alliances and Akbar's diplomatic policy won him the loyalty of the Rajputs, who accepted his authority. The only exception was Rana Pratap of Mewar, who continued to defy him.

## Akbar and Rana Pratap

In 1576 Akbar sent a huge army to Chittorgarh under the command of Raja Mansingh and Prince Salim to fight Rana Pratap. The battle between the two armies took place at Haldi Ghati. The Mughals won, but Rana Pratap refused to acknowledge de-



fig: 6.3 Akbar's court



fig: 6.4 Rana Pratap

feat. He sought shelter in the hilly regions of Chittorgarh and continued to resist the Mughals throughout his life. He reorganized his army with money given to him by Bhama Shah, his minister in Mewar. He also successfully reestablished his hold over several parts of his kingdom.

Through such policies Akbar was able to include Indian Muslims, Rajput kings and others in his administration, besides people from Turkey and Iran.

### Rani Durgawati and Akbar

Akbar wanted to annexe Gondwana or Garha Katanga, the rich and powerful kingdom of the Gonds, which had its capital at Chauragarh. Following the death of King Dalpat in 1548, his five-year-old son Veernarayan Singh ascended the throne of Garha Katanga. His mother, Durgawati, who was his guardian, ruled the kingdom successfully on his behalf with the help and guidance of her ministers. She established political unity and peace throughout Gondwana with her liberal attitude, efficiency and able administration.

When Akbar's army attacked Gondwana under the command of Asaf Khan, Rani Durgawati rode to battle in armour, mounted on her elephant. Unfortunately, she was struck by an arrow and fell unconscious. On gaining consciousness, she learned that her army had been defeated. She stabbed herself to death, fearful of facing disgrace when captured by the enemy. At that time, Chhattisgarh was known as the Ratanpur kingdom and was ruled by the Kalchuri dynasty.

In this way due to these policies of Akbar among its office bearers beside Iranians and Turks.

### Administration

How did Akbar manage to administer such a huge empire? He did so by introducing many administrative reforms. He divided his vast territory into 15 *subas* or provinces. Each *suba* was sub-divided into a number of *sarkars* or districts and each *sarkar* was further sub-divided into a number of *parganas*. A *pargana* comprised a group of villages. Akbar appointed loyal officers at all levels, from the *parganas* right up to the royal court. These officers of the Mughal government were known as *mansabdars*.

Who were the *mansabdars*? What were their duties?

### Mansabdari system

All the *mansabdars* were appointed personally by the emperor and he had direct control over them, posting them in different parts of his empire. The *mansabdars*' rank depended on the number of cavalry and infantry he maintained. They had to ride with their army to the aid of the emperor whenever required. In return, the *mansabdars*, especially the senior ones, were given very high salaries. They lived in great luxury.

The *mansabdars* were not paid cash. Instead, they were deputed to collect revenue from a certain area and kept part of it to cover their salary. These areas were called *jagirs*, hence the *mansabdars* was also referred to as *jagirdars*.

*Mansabdars* were transferred every three to four years, so that they could not get too close to the people and revolt against the emperor. Akbar organized the administration in such a way that every officer had to obey his orders and could not do as he wished.

How were the *mansabdars* paid?

### Revenue system

When Akbar became emperor the system of collecting taxes from farmers was weak and not well organized. *Zamindars* and minor officials exploited the farmers, collecting all kinds of taxes from them. Akbar ruled that the tax to be paid by the farmers would be decided by the acreage of land they cultivated and it would have to be paid in cash, not in kind. The normal rates were a third or one-half of the value of the crop. The local *zamindars* had to help the officers in tax collection and this revenue was used for the administrative expenses of the Mughal Empire.

The expense of the state was done by the tax collected from the farmers.

### Religious policies

Akbar built a prayer room near the mosque in his capital Fatepur Sikri where he held discourses on religion with saints and believers of different faiths. He invited the *maulvis* of different Muslim sects as well as Hindu, Jain, Parsi and Christian *yogis* and priests to these discourses between the years 1575 and 1585. He eventually concluded that all religions preached the same values of truth and goodness. It was the will of God that was responsible for the diversity we see in the world – with its different cultures and religions. He firmly believed that earthly rulers must maintain this diversity and not be intolerant to differences. They should adopt a policy of 'peace and friendship to all'. His close associate Abul Fazl had a big hand in convincing him to follow this path. Abul Fazl was the one who wrote a detailed history of Akbar's rule in a book titled *Akbarnama*.

It was under this policy of religious tolerance that Akbar decided to do away with the *jaziya* tax and the pilgrimage tax levied on Hindus. He gave permission to build temples and made donations to Hindu and Jain temples and *mutts*. He had epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharath and Upanishads translated into Persian. He also adopted many values and practices from various religions in his personal life. He worshipped the sun daily, reduced his consumption of meat and liquor and celebrated festivals like Diwali and Navroz. His policies won him the support and loyalty of his people.

Akbar ruled for around 50 years. His son Jehangir ascended the throne on his death.

## EXERCISES

### I. Fill in the blanks:-

1. The officials of the Mughal Empire were called .....
2. .... wrote *Akbarnama*.
3. The *mansabdars* had to maintain a troop of .....
4. The salaries of *mansabdars* were paid in the form of .....
5. The coin made of bronze is called .....and coin made of silver is called.....

### II. Which of the following are true or false:-

1. Farmers had to pay taxes in the form of grain during Akbar's reign.
2. Officials measured the cultivated land of farmers before deciding the tax they had to pay.
3. Farmers had to give a fourth of their harvest as tax.
4. The *zamindars* helped the officials to collect taxes.

### III. Answers the following questions:-

1. What is the source of our information on the life of Babur?
2. Why did Humayun flee from India?
3. Was Chattisgarh a part of Akbar's empire?
4. Which art did Babur take steps to develop in India?
5. Why did Rana Pratap not accept the authority of Akbar?
6. Which policies of Akbar influenced the people the most?
7. Who appointed the *mansabdars*?
8. Why were the *mansabdars* routinely transferred?
9. Describe the religious policies adopted by Akbar.
10. Describe the main aspects of Akbar's revenue system.

## Things to do

1. Collect pictures of important buildings constructed during the Mughal era and describe them.
2. Make list of the name of Mughal emperors.
3. What are the differences between the present festival and festivals of the king Akbar's period.

