

1st battle of Panipat

THE BATTLE OF PANIPAT (20 APRIL 1526)

(A conflict with Ibrahim Lodi, the ruler of Delhi, was inevitable, and Babur prepared for it by marching towards Delhi. Ibrahim Lodi met Babur at Panipat with a force estimated at 100,000 men and 1000 elephants. Since the Indian armies generally contained large hordes of servants, the fighting men on Ibrahim Lodi's side must have been far less than this figure. Babur had crossed the Indus with a force of 12,000, but this had been swelled by his army in India, and the large number of Hindustani nobles and soldiers who joined Babur in the Punjab. Even then, Babur's army was numerically inferior. Babur strengthened his position by resting one wing of his army on the city of Panipat which had a large number of houses, and protected the other by means of a ditch filled with branches of trees. In front, he lashed together a large number of carts, to act as a defending wall. Between two carts, breastworks were erected on which soldiers could rest their guns and fire.) Babur calls his device an Ottoman (Rumi) device, for it had been used by the Ottomans in their famous battle against Shah Ismail of Iran. Babur had also secured the services of

two Ottoman master-gunners, Ustad Ali and Mustafa. (The use of gunpowder had been gradually developing in India. Babur says that he used it for the first time in his attacks on the fortress of Bhira. Apparently, gunpowder was known in India but its use for artillery became common in north India with the advent of Babur.)

(Ibrahim Lodi had no idea of the strongly defended position of Babur. He had apparently expected Babur to fight a mobile mode of warfare which was usual with the Central Asians, making rapid advance or retreat as the need arose. After skirmishing for seven or eight days, Ibrahim Lodi's forces came out for the fateful battle. Seeing the strength of Babur's position, they hesitated. While Ibrahim was still reorganising his forces, the two extreme wings of Babur's army wheeled round and attacked Ibrahim's forces from the side and rear. Babur's gunners used their guns with good effect from the front. But Babur gives a large part of the credit of his victory to his bowmen.) Curiously, he makes little reference to Ibrahim's elephants. Apparently, Ibrahim had little time to use them.)

Despite these early setbacks, Ibrahim Lodi's army fought valiantly. The battle raged for two or three hours. Ibrahim Lodi fought to the last, with a group of 5000-6000 people around him. It is estimated that besides him, more than 15,000 of his men were killed in the battle.

(The battle of Panipat is regarded as one of the decisive battles of Indian history. It broke the back of Lodi power, and brought under Babur's control the entire area upto Delhi and Agra. The treasures stored up by Ibrahim Lodi at Agra relieved Babur from his financial difficulties. The rich territory up to Jaunpur also lay open to Babur.) However, Babur had to wage two hard-fought battles, one against Rana Sanga of Mewar, and the other against the eastern Afghans, before he could consolidate his hold on this area. Viewed from this angle, the battle of Panipat was not as decisive in the political field as has been made out. Its real importance lies in the fact that it opened a new phase in the struggle for domination in north India.)

(The difficulties of Babur after his victory at Panipat were manifold. Many of his *begs* were not prepared for a long campaign in India. With the onset of the hot weather, their misgivings had increased. They were far away from home in a strange and hostile land. Babur

tells us that the people of India displayed 'remarkable hostility', abandoning their villages at the approach of the Mughal armies. Obviously, the memories of Timur's sacking and plundering of the towns and villages were still fresh in their minds.

Babur knew that the resources in India alone would enable him to found a strong empire and satisfy his *begs*. 'Not for us the poverty of Kabul again', he records in his diary. He thus took a firm stand, proclaiming his intention to stay on in India, and granting leave to a number of his *begs* who wanted to go back to Kabul. This immediately cleared the air. But it also invited the hostility of Rana Sanga who began his preparations for a showdown with Babur.