

# **FIRST BATTLE OF PANIPAT (1526)**

The First Battle of Panipat was fought between the invading forces of Zahir-ud-din Babur **and** the last empire of the Delhi Sultanate, Lodi Empire during the rule of Ibrahim Lodi which took place on 21 April 1526 in North India. It marked the beginning of the Mughal Empire. This was one of the earliest battles involving gun powder firearms and field artillery.

Babur's forces numbered around 15,000 men with 20 to 24 pieces of field artillery. The fighting force of Ibrahim Lodi was around 30,000 to 40,000 men in total, along with at least 1000 war elephants. Babur's army used guns which proved to be decisive in the battlefield but the Sultan lacked any field artillery. Moreover, the sound of the cannons used by Babur's army frightened Lodi's elephants, causing them to trample Lodi's own men.

## **Background**

After losing Samarkand for the second time, Babur gave attention to conquer Hindustan as he reached the banks of the Chenab in 1519. Until 1524, his aim was to only expand his rule to Punjab, mainly to fulfil his ancestor Timur's legacy, since it used to be part of his empire. At that time, most of North India was under the rule of Ibrahim Lodi of the Lodi dynasty, but the empire was crumbling and there were many defectors. He received invitations from Daulat Khan Lodi, Governor of Punjab and Ala-ud-Din, uncle of Ibrahim. He sent an ambassador to Ibrahim, claiming himself the rightful heir to the throne of the country, however the ambassador was detained at Lahore and released months later.

Babur started for Lahore, Punjab, in 1524 but found that Daulat Khan Lodi had been driven out by forces sent by Ibrahim Lodi. When Babur arrived at Lahore, the Lodi army marched out and was routed. In response, Babur burned Lahore for two days, then marched to Dipalpur, placing Alam Khan, another rebel uncle of Lodi's, as governor. Alam Khan was quickly overthrown and fled to Kabul. In response, Babur supplied Alam Khan with troops who later joined up with Daulat Khan Lodi and together with about 30,000 troops, they besieged Ibrahim Lodi at Delhi. He defeated them and drove Alam's army off; and Babur realised Lodi would not allow him to occupy the Punjab.

## **Battle**

Hearing of the size of Ibrahim's army, Babur secured his right flank against the city of Panipat, while digging a trench covered with tree branches to secure his left flanks. In the centre, he placed 700 carts tied together with ropes. Between every two carts, there were breastworks for his matchlock men. Babur also ensured that there was enough space for his soldiers to rest their guns and fire. Babur referred to this method as the "Ottoman device" due to its previous use by the Ottomans during the Battle of Chaldiran.

When Ibrahim's army arrived, he found the approach to Babur's army too narrow to attack. While Ibrahim redeployed his forces to allow for the narrower front, Babur quickly took advantage of

the situation to flank (*tulghuma*) the Lodi army. Many of Ibrahim's troops were unable to get into action, and fled when the battle turned against them. Ibrahim Lodi was killed while trying to retreat and beheaded. 20,000 Lodi soldiers were killed in battle.

## **Advantage of Cannons in the Battle**

It is generally held that Babur's guns proved decisive in battle, firstly because Ibrahim Lodi lacked any field artillery, but also because the sound of the cannon frightened Lodi's elephants, causing them to trample Lodi's own men. However a reading of the contemporary sources show that more than the gun, it was the tactics which helped in winning the day. The new war tactics introduced by Babur were the *tulughma* and the *araba*. *Tulughma* meant dividing the whole army into various units, viz. the Left, the Right and the Centre. The Left and Right divisions were further subdivided into Forward and Rear divisions. Through this a small army could be used to surround the enemy from all the sides. the Centre Forward division was then provided with carts (*araba*) which were placed in rows facing the enemy and tied to each other with animal hide ropes. Behind them were placed cannons protected and supported by mantelets which could be used to easily manoeuvre the canons. These two tactics made Babur's artillery lethal. The guns and cannons could be fired without any fear of being hit as they were shielded by the bullock carts which were held in place due to the hide ropes holding them together. the nozzle of the heavy cannons could also be easily changed as they could be manoeuvred by the mantelets which were provided with wheels.

Ibrahim Lodi died on the field of battle, abandoned by his feudatories and generals (many of whom were mercenaries). Most of them changed their allegiance to the new master of Delhi. However had Sultan Ibrahim survived another hour of fighting he would have won, as Babur had no reserves and his troops were rapidly tiring.

## **Babur's Tactics**

- The weapons were not all, it was Babur's tactics of *Tulughma* and *Araba* that led him to victory.
- *Tulughma*: it meant dividing the whole army into various units, viz. the Left, the Right and the Centre.
- The Left and Right divisions were further subdivided into Forward and Rear divisions.
- Through this a small army could be used to surround the enemy from all the sides.
- *Araba*: the centre forward division was then provided with carts (*araba*) which were placed in rows facing the enemy and tied to each other with animal hide ropes.

## **Result of the Battle**

- The First Battle of Panipat resulted in the death of Ibrahim Lodi and also the end of Lodi Dynasty and the Delhi Sultanate in India. Also, with the end of the Sultanate, the Mughal rule began in India.

- Panipat, a part of modern-day Haryana, has been a land of many important battles in the history of India and also the land that fought the maximum battles for rule over the Northern part of India. The Third Battle of Panipat was also one among the greatest battles fought in the history of the country.