



*Journal of Advances and
Scholarly Researches in
Allied Education*

*Vol. VIII, Issue No. XVI,
Oct-2014, ISSN 2230-7540*

A STUDY ON MUGHAL MILITARY REVOLUTION

AN
INTERNATIONALLY
INDEXED PEER
REVIEWED &
REFEREED JOURNAL

A Study on Mughal Military Revolution

Hemendra Kant*

Abstract – This doctoral study, *Mughals at War: Babur, Akbar and the Indian Military Revolution*, examines the transformation of warfare in South Asia during the foundation and consolidation of the Mughal Empire. It emphasizes the practical specifics of how the Imperial army waged war and prepared for war—technology, tactics, operations, training and logistics. These are topics poorly covered in the existing Mughal historiography, which primarily addresses military affairs through their background and context cultural, political and economic. I argue that events in India during this period in many ways paralleled the early stages of the ongoing "Military Revolution" in early modern Europe. The Mughals effectively combined the martial implements and practices of Europe, Central Asia and India into a model that was well suited for the unique demands and challenges of their setting.

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INTRODUCTION

The Military Revolution is a theory intended to explain the military, political and economic transformation of Europe during the Early Modern period and by extension explain that region's eventual rise to world dominance. The timeframe and specifics vary from author to author, but the basic principles remain the same. In the period between the 14th and 18th centuries a series of innovations in military technology and organization reshaped not only the conduct of warfare but also the whole of European society. These changes included the introduction of more lethal missile weapons especially those powered by gunpowder—and the resulting rise of infantry as a decisive force. There was also a new science of organization at all levels, from drill and small unit tactics to logistics and grand strategy. The management of such sophisticated machinery and complex systems demanded standardization and extensive training hastening the emergence of a truly professional military class (Agoston, 2005. Digby, 1971. Glete, 2001. Hildinger, 1997). The human and economic costs of maintaining these new model armies led to the development of more advanced methods of civil administration and social control the elements required to create truly centralized "military-bureaucratic" modern states. Order led to prosperity as unified nations created more efficient systems of industry and trade.

The idea of the Military Revolution has roots dating back to at least the early 20th century, and is hinted at by authors like Hans Delbruck and CWC Oman. Its first formal presentation, however, was in Michael Roberts' seminal essay, "The Military Revolution 1560 - 1660." Roberts argues that tactical innovations and the development of linear formations increased the

relative power of infantry, allowing for and eventually mandating the development of larger and larger armies (Lorge, 2008. Parker, 1996. Rogers, 1995). Rationality and discipline became essential qualities, both at the army level where an increased level of competence was required to master new doctrine and tactics, and at the state level where governments had to develop new institutions and expand their powers in order to manage growing manpower and resource demands. Military advances also fostered economic advances.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The Mughals' failings in comparison to later achievements in colonial India and in Europe have led to an enduring skepticism about their place and significance in military history. They did not attain a true monopoly on organized violence. They did not create a fully centralized and standardized military system. They did not build a state and a national identity independent of any individual ruler or dynasty. Yet how fair is it to judge them against these standards against the accomplishments of truly modern polities? A better test would be a comparison of the Mughals with their actual contemporaries, the European powers at the center of the Military Revolution debate. Did the Spanish and Dutch states described in Rogers' and Parker's narratives or even the *ancient regime* governments of Black's "mature" military revolution—meet such high standards? In fact early modern European states were confronted by many of the same challenges and shortcomings faced by the Mughals. They had to contend with persistent factions based on ethnicity, religion and loyalty to individual leaders or dynastic families. This process arguably was not complete everywhere until after 1815 or perhaps after 1848 or even after 1871.

Yet the achievements of the 19th and 20th centuries are often applied retroactively when making comparisons between Western and non-Western states in the early modern era. It is assumed—not without good reason that true modernity was latent in the European polities of the 16th and 17th centuries. Despite serious flaws and periodic reverses they were making progress towards truly integrated political, military and economic systems—towards what we now understand as the modern state.

There is another essential reason that outside observers tend to discount the Mughals' military achievements. In many cases they simply lack the data needed to make informed judgments about the Empire and its armies, and all too frequently they assume that this absence of information implies an absence of meaningful events. The current Mughal military historiography is skeletal at best (Rosen, Stephen Peter, 1996). Most discussions on this topic are merely digressions or isolated chapters in works with a broad thematic or regional scope like the aforementioned books by Parker, Lorge and others or in general surveys of Mughal history written by authors like John F. Richards or Douglas Streisand. Even where dedicated works on Mughal-era military history do exist, they tend to focus more on the foundations of the Imperial army political, economic and cultural than its actual function (Bryant, 2004). This reflects a more general trend in Asian and South Asian military history, a specialty that has evolved in a very different direction from its Western counterpart.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries this outlook was shared by a number of the most prominent custodians of primary sources and most prolific producers of secondary sources on the Empire. The dire assessments of Irvine and his compatriots would negatively influence Mughal historiography—relating to matters both military and civilian for many decades to come. Later works by Indian historians after Independence offered a somewhat more sympathetic outlook on the Mughals, but continued their predecessors' antiquarian approach. *Armies of the Great Mughals: 1526 -1707*, by Raj Kumar Phul, is a notable example. It serves as a sort of almanac of the Imperial army, and it is rich in facts, figures and useful anecdotes. Yet the book has very little in the way of argument or analysis. Jadunath Sarkar, another prominent Indian scholar, produced more critical and analytical works on the Mughal military, but his texts focus primarily on the later history of the Empire (Timothy, 2006). They discuss the Empire's crisis, decline and fall, but they do little to explain the transformative events of its foundation.

CONCLUSION:

The Mughal military system and of the general state of the military art in early modern South Asia is much different than the image presented by conventional wisdom. For both the growing Empire and its rivals, this period was one of profound, revolutionary change

in the way their states and societies waged war. In the space of a few brief decades the Mughals and their enemies mastered new technology and developed complex doctrine and tactics for its use in battle. Gunpowder weapons played an important role in the creation of the new system, but they were part of a larger whole. The method of warfare that became the standard in India was based on a sophisticated combined arms approach and the close coordination of infantry, cavalry and artillery. In support of these combat operations the Mughals also created complex procedures for the mobilization and preparation of manpower and material goods. The final outcome of all of this organization and innovation was one of the world's most formidable military machines, a force that could match any of the emerging Western armies in quality and exceed all of them in quantity. There was nothing regressive or inferior about the Mughal army or the methods of warfare practiced in South Asia during this period. They were in fact the product of an evolution not dissimilar to the ongoing "Military Revolution" in Europe. Yet not all of their inventions and solutions were identical to those implemented in the West. While the Mughals and other Indian states adopted technology and processes from abroad, they were informed consumers, not passive imitators. They adapted and refined their new instruments to meet the unique demands and challenges of their setting.

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Corresponding Author

Hemendra Kant*

E-Mail – kbsinstitute9@gmail.com