

Role of Geographical Factors in the Evolution and Growth of the Military System of the Delhi Sultanate

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The geographical factors played an important role in the evolution and growth of the military system of the Delhi Sultanate. These factors include the plains, mountains, hills, forests, deserts, rivers, climate, sea and routes.

The mountains, hills and deserts stand as the barriers in the northwest of India in the way of invading armies from Transoxiana (Central Asia). The forests provided wood to manufacture boats, weapons, bullock carts etc. The rivers and the climate ensure adequate supply of provisions, food, water and fodder to armymen and war animals. The sea (particularly western coast) through maritime contact facilitates the supply of war horses, and weapons and other commodities from Transoxiana, Persia and Arabia.

Though physical geography consists many factors but in this chapter we shall consider only the above mentioned factors in an attempt to analyse the influence of these physical factors on the military system of the Sultanate.

India can be conveniently divided into three physiographic plains from north to south. The Ganges Basin: it includes, Punjab, Oudh, Bihar and Bengal, and lies¹ between the Himalayas and the Vindhya mountains which stretches from the Transoxiana in the north and west to the Bay of Bengal in the east.² In the Vedic Age (1000-1500 B.C.) this division was called 'Aryavarta' and Hindustan in the later times.³ The Central Highlands: These include the Rajasthan uplands, Sindhy the Central Indian Uplands, the Bundelkhand uplands and the Malwa Plateau, Gujarat.⁴

The Pammsular Plateau: it extends from the Vindhya mountain towards the south as far as the rivers the Krishna and the Kavery, and further to the coastal city of Kanyakumari in the extreme south. From west to east it lies between the western and the eastern coasts.⁵

Now we shall see, how the plains have influenced the military system of Delhi Sultanate. The plain of Ganges Basin was vast and alluvial through which the Sindh (Indus), the Ganges and the Brahmaputra and their tributaries were flowing.⁶ Consequently, it dominates India's political, economic and social life as well. The water of these rivers and the monsoon rainfall water which was generally adequate irrigated the corps.⁷ The availability of water ensures cultivation and vegetation and simultaneously it fulfilled the requirement of drinking water for human beings and war cattles. As a matter of fact, there was no lack of food, fodder and water in the capital and in the other Iqtas, particularly, northern India. The region enjoyed abundant supply of meat, salt, sugar, ghee (butter), pan,⁸ corn wheat, balley, rice⁹ and fodder.¹⁰

Similar role was played by the plains of central highlands and the Deccan plateau in the polity and economy. Although the plains of central highlands and the Deccan plateau have the network of rivers

¹ R.H. Major, Nicolo Conti, (edited) India in the 15th Century, First Pub. 1857, Delhi, P.21.

² Thomas Hungford Holdich, India, New Delhi, 1975, P. 130. U.N. Day, The Govt. of the Sultanate, Delhi, P. 10.

³ Ibru Hasan, Central Structure of Mughal Empire, New Delhi, rep. 2001, P. 32.

⁴ K. Siddhartha, India: The Physical Aspects, Third edi. 2001 (rep. 2005), New Delhi, P. 40.

⁵ K.M. Panikkar, Geographical Factors in Indian History, Bombay, 1955, P. 26.

⁶ O.H.K. Spati and A.T.A. Learmonth, India and Pakistan; Soc. Edi., London, 1957, PP. 33-34.

⁷ B.T.F. P. 158. H.K. Naqvi, Agricultural, Industrial and Urban Dynamism under the Sultans of Delhi, (1206-1526), Delhi, 2001, P. 12. K. Shall, Historical Essays, Vol. 2, Delhi, P. 95. Spate, Op.Cit., 487.

⁸ H.K. Naqvi, Op. Cit., P. 12.

⁹ B.T.F., PP. 192-193. Barani provides us the list of prices of different grains field by Alauddin in 1304 A.D. and their supply to capital from the villages of Doab region.

¹⁰ U.M.A., P. 114. Naqvi, Op. Cit., PP. 13-15, J.J.L. Gommans, Mughal Warfare, Op. Cit., P. 112.

and sufficient annual monsoon rainfall in some parts,¹¹ yet, were not as fertile as the plains of Gange Basin. Because a big section of the Central highlands and Deccan plateau was arid and where the average monsoon rainfall was less than 20 inches (50 cm.).¹² These drought affected regions were; the Thar, the Sindh, the Thal, north Gujarat, west Madhaya Pradesh (Malwa), linterior Karnatak (Mysore), Rayalseema and some parts of west Tamilnadu.¹³ Apart from this, the number of mighty rivers of the Central Highlands was also small though the Deccan Plateau had the network of big rivers.¹⁴ But inspite of this, the overall quantity of monsoon rainfall of the central Highlands and the Deccan Plateau was not much different as compared to monsoon rainfall of the Ganges Basin and was generally between 40-80 inches (100-200 cm.).¹⁵

Thus, the supply of water from the rivers and from the monsoon rainfall was used for the purposes of irrigation and drinking and ensured the production of crops and fodder (dub, straw of wheat, barley and corn) for militarymen, human beings and war cattles. The crops grown in the central highlands¹⁶ and the Deccan plateau were almost the same as grown in northern India. According to Domingo Paes, "The land of Vijayanagar empire was fertile and well cultivated. The crops of rice, barley, wheat and beans have been grown by the peasants in abundance and there was no lack of food and fodder for human beings and war-cattles."¹⁷

The easy supply of food and fodder to the forces of Alauddin Khalji from the markets of Deogiri, which was the famous city of the Deccan plateau during the Sultanate period, made easy for him to conquer Arongal and Malabar in 1309-10 A.D.¹⁸ It is noteable that without necessary supply of provisions, food and fodder, the deployment of armies would be impossible. Thus the supply influenced the military organization.

In addition, the plains affected the military strategy also. The Ganges Basin has no impassable barriers in form of mountains, hills, deserts, and big dense forests to impede the mobility of forces of the invaders.¹⁹ Hence, it was easily occupied by the Mauryans, The Guptas, the Sultans, and the Mughals²⁰, the Rajputs

rulers of India and by the foreign invaders like Mahmud of Ghazni (1000-30) Muhammd Ghauri²¹(1191-1206), Timur Amir (1398 A.D.) and Babar (1505-26) and frequently raided by the Mongols in the 13th and 14th centuries.²²

On the other hand, the plains of Central Highlands and the Deccan Plateau were covered with the mountains, hills, forests and deserts which always offered difficulties in the track of marching armies and thus hindered the mobility of marching armies. The sandy, stony and thorny tracks of the valley of Aravalli mountain range of Rajputana, always offered difficulties to the invaders. In 593 H. Malik Kutubuddin, lieutenant of Muhammad Gauri, marched from Delhi against the Rae Karan of Naharwala through Rajputana and halted at Ajmer.²³ In order to proceed from Ajmer to Naharwala he had the choice of two routes. First, along the eastern slopes of the Arawali mountains, via Udaipur and Indur, second, through the western or Marwar side which has no mountains and hills and it was easy to move on this track. Therefore, Malik Kutubbdin, choose the later route.²⁴

Similarly, the mountains, hills, forests and ghushing streams of the plain of Deccan plateau offered difficulties to the advance of Alauddin's army during his expeditions against Arangal and Malabar in 1309and 1310 respectively.²⁵

The plains or terrains affected the military strategy in another way also. Fakhr-I-Muddabir, the author of Adab-ul-Harb-Wa Shujaah²⁶, has emphasized on the choice of battlefield and advised more care in its selection.²⁷ According to him it should be the strategy of the commander and Sultan that the thorny, dusty, wet and sandy sites were to be avoided which would damage the horse hoofs and also hinder the mobility of the army, particularly of the cavalry. The site should be spacious and extensive, hard and smooth, neither very close nor very far from the habitation and the secure supply of water.²⁸

At the time of rebellion of Ain-ul-Mulk 1338-9 A.D., the Muqti of Oudh, (later Deogir) Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-51) encamped at a strategic place in the suburbs of Kanauj which made his position secure and he easily defeated him.²⁹ In the same way in 998 H. Sultan Sikandar Lodi, taking a strategic position, encamped, on the bank of Jumna while on his march

¹¹ A.I., PP. 257-259-211. Spate, Op. Cit., P. 40.

¹² L. Dudgey Stamp, Asia, Tenth edition, London, 1959, P. 220.

¹³ K. Sidhartha, Op. Cit., P. 135.

¹⁴ A.T.H., PP. 257-259. Alberuni, the author of Tarikh-ul-Hind, has given the list of rivers of the 11th century Hindustan.

¹⁵ L.D. Stamp, Op.Cit., P. 228.

¹⁶ Holdich, Op.Cit., P. 52. B.T.F., 193. Barani, enumerates, "that the Coru and other grains were supplied from Thain (Malwa) to the capital (Delhi), during the reign of Allauddin in 1516-17 A.D.

¹⁷ Donimgo Paes, R.H. Major, edited, Op.Cit., P. 19. The traveller visited Vijaynagar in 1516-17. Abder Razzak, who visited Bidjanagar in 1442 A.D., also remarks, "the fields of Bijanagar were alluvial and well cultivated." R.H. Major, Op. Cit., P. 22.

¹⁸ K.K.F., PP. 204-228.

¹⁹ Ibn Hasan, Op. Cit., P. 34.

²⁰ K.M. Panikkar, Geographical factors, Op.Cit., P. 24.

²¹ Rawat, T.N. I, PP. 79-452.

²² T.M.T., P. 409. B.N. P. 429. B.T.F. PP. 162-189.

²³ N.T.M., P. 229.

²⁴ Rao. T.N.I, PP. 518-520.

²⁵ K.K.F., PP. 205-236.

²⁶ M.S. Khan, Life and works of Fakhr-I-Muddabbir, I.C., Vo. I, April, 1977, P.139.

²⁷ M. Mujeeb, The Indian Muslims, Op. Cit., PP. 180-181.

²⁸ Adab-ul-Hasb, Hindi Tr., S.A.A. Rizvi, Adi Turk Katin Bharat, P. 262.

²⁹ T.F.B., P. 248.

against Sultan Ashraf, the Muqti of Biana who had to submit to the Sultan.³⁰

Another interesting peculiarity of the medieval Indian geography were the mountains, the hills, and the forests. Northern India was bounded by the highest wall of the Himalayas.³¹ It runs across the whole of northern boundary from Assam (Kamrup) in the east to the modern Afghanistan in the west.³² Hindukush mountain range³³, form a natural boundary between Central Asia and South Asia (The Indian sub-continent).³⁴ It begins from a point near 37° N. and 74° 38' E.³⁵ Shandur Range, may be considered to extend from the Karambar river in the east to the Lowarai pass on the west.³⁶ The Safed-Koh Range located³⁷ between the Hindukush and the river Indus and in its south lies the Khybar pass.³⁸ The Sulaiman Range lay between Punjab³⁹ and the northern Baluchistan.⁴⁰ It was better known by the names of Takht-I-Sulaiman and the Kaisargarh.⁴¹ Kirthar Range lie between the north-west Sind and the southern Baluchistan.⁴² Siwalik Range run from the Indus in north-west along the sub-Himalayas to the Brahmaputra river in the east.⁴³ The Patkai and the Arrakan Ranges lie between Kamrup and Burma from north to South.⁴⁴

The Central Highlands also have the prominent mountain ranges. The Aravalli Range lie in the Eastern Rajputana from north to South between the south Punjab and the north Gujarat.⁴⁵ Maikal Range run in a north-east direction from Rajnandgoan to the Amarkantak Knot and then turns north west meeting the Vindhaya Range the North of Jabalpur.⁴⁶ Kaimur Range located in Northern Malwa on the eastern portion of the Vindhaya mountains.⁴⁷ The Vindhaya

Range run west to east and divides central India from the Deccan peninsula.⁴⁸

In the Deccan Plateau, the Satpura Range falls between the Narmada and the Tapi rivers.⁴⁹ Both the Western and the Eastern coasts have the mountains ranges from north to south.⁵⁰

Hills were the next important physical features of Indian physiography. On the North Western frontier, Mohammand Hills lie between the Swat and the Kabul rivers and further touch the Indus in the east.⁵¹ The Khyber Hills is bounded on the north by the river Kabul and on the south by the slopes of Safed Koh mountains.⁵² The Waziristan Hills is bounded by the Gomal river on the south, the Kurram river on the north.⁵³ The Marwat Hills begins from the Waziristan hills in a north east direction, separates the Bannu basin from the Derazat valley.⁵⁴ The Kohat Hills extend in an east-west direction from Kurram Valley to the Indus.⁵⁵ The Makhiali hills or the Salt-Range (Koh-I-Jud) hills,⁵⁶ lie between the Indus and the Jhelum in the extreme northwest of Punjab in the Sind Sagar Doab.⁵⁷

The Central Highlands also have some of the important hills ranges. The hills of Baghel Khand Plateau, is situated in the east of the Maikala mountain and north of the Mahanadi basin and is bounded by the Son river on the north. The hills of Chhotanagpur plateau lie in the south Bihar.⁵⁸ Rajmahal hills lay between Sarkar (district) Lakhnaunti in the Mughal Suba of Bengal and Sarkar Munger in Bihar.⁵⁹ Garhat hills of Orissa spread from Southern border of the Ranchi plateau to the Mahanadi river in South.⁶⁰

Main hills of the Deccan plateau were as follow: The Hills lie both in the western and the eastern coast of

³⁰ N.U., P. 56.
³¹ Hamadani, The Frontier Policy of the Sultans of Delhi, Op.Cit., P. 7.
³² Spate, India and Pakistan, Op. Cit., P. 15.
³³ Rehla, P. 178. Ibn Battuta called the Hindukush, "SLAYER OF Indians", because the slave boys and girls to whom he brought from India at the time of return journey had dies in the Hindukush mountain due to extreme cold and heavy snowfall.
³⁴ I.H. Siddiqui, Amir Khursan: A Political and Social Thinkar, Indo-Iranica, Vol. VI, Kolkata, March, June 2007, P. 6.
³⁵ Gulati, India's Northwest Frontier, Op.Cit., P. 3. Also see T.N. I, (Raverty), P. 74.
³⁶ Gulati, Op.Cit., P. 6.
³⁷ T.N.I, P. 74.
³⁸ B.N., P. 209. Spate, Op.Cit., 435.
³⁹ T.N.I, Preface, P. XVI.
⁴⁰ Rehla, PP. 180-181.
⁴¹ Thomas Holdich, India, Op.Cit., P. 37.
⁴² L. Dudley Stamp, Op.Cit., P. 196.
⁴³ R.h. Major, Op.Cit., P. XIIIV (44). K. Sidhartha, India: The Physical Aspect, Op.Cit., P. 30.
⁴⁴ Spate, Op.Cit., P. 4.
⁴⁵ K.M. Panikar, Geographical Factors, Op.Cit., P. 25.
⁴⁶ K. Siddhartha, Op. Cit., P. 44.
⁴⁷ Spate, Op.Cit., P. 4.

⁴⁸ Stamp, OP.Cit., P. 199.
⁴⁹ Ibid., P.
⁵⁰ A.I., PP. 208-210. Holdich, India, P. 131.
⁵¹ Gulati, Op.Cit., P. 6. During the period under study, the northwest frontier was a well-defined region with a long history. On the north it set off from the mountains of the Hindukush, to the south it was bounded by Baluchistan and the Thar; on the east by the territories of Kashmir and the Punjab and on the west by Afghanistan (Ibid. PP. 1-2). Also see. I.G. of India, Provincial Series, No.I, Northwest Frontier Province, 1908, P.1. Spate, Op.Cit., PP. 441-45.
⁵² Spate, P. 441.
⁵³ Haldich, India, Op.Cit., PP. 78-81.
⁵⁴ Gulati, Op.Cit., P. 8.
⁵⁵ Stamp, Op.Cit., P. 282.
⁵⁶ M.T.N.I, PP. 582-537.
⁵⁷ B.B.N., PP. 379-80.
⁵⁸ K. Siddartha, Op.Cit., P. 44.
⁵⁹ A.A.N., Vol. III, P. 151. A.A.I.N., Vol. II, P. 144; Also see, N. Mannuci, Storio do Major Vol.I, edited, W. Irvine, Calcutta, 1925. PP. 568-69; Yogendra, P. Roy, Significance of Taliagarhi Fort during the seventeenth century, P.I.H.C.. 62nd session, Bhopal, 2001, PP. 1070-3.
⁶⁰ Siddhartha, Op.Cit., P. 45.

Paninsula (India) which ran from north towards south.
⁶¹ The Nilgiri hills lie between South Mysore (modern Karnataka) and the Ralaghat pass. And the cardaimon hills lie between the Pala Ghat Pass and cape camorin in the extreme south.
⁶²

Forests which were found in almost all parts of India except the deserts regions of the Thar, the Sind and the Thal, was the striking physical feature of Indian physiography. Thick forests were found in some parts of the Ganges Basin (northern India), the Central Highlands⁶³ and the Deccan Plateau.⁶⁴

The production in forests was dependent on rainfall which classifies the forests of Sultanate into four rainfall regions. The Wet zone, has a rainfall of 80 inches to 250 cms. (Evergreen forests).⁶⁵ In the Intermediate Zone, with a rainfall of 40 to 60 inches or 100-150 cm. were the Deciduous or Monsoon Forests. This type of forests were found in almost all parts of India.⁶⁶ In the dry zone, with a rainfall of 20 to 40 inches or 50 to 100 cm. falls the Dry forests and Seruband. The Arid zone, with a rainfall of less than 20 inches or below 50 cm. (desert or semi-desert).

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⁶¹ Stamp, Op.Cit., P. 334. Spate, Op.Cit., P. 679.

⁶² Ibid., PP. 644-45.

⁶³ Amir Khusrau, the author of Gurat-ul-Kamal, diowener, Indicates the forests of Rohilakhand (in northern India) region. (K.M.F., P. 539). M. Elphinstone, History of India, P. 5. Spate, Op.Cit., P. 68. Both mention the forests of entire Sultanate.

⁶⁴ Ibn Khuodhbiti, an Arab Geographer, who completed his work, 'Kitab-al-Masalik Wal Mamlik' (The book of Roads and kingdoms) in 846-7 A.D. mentions the forests of Malabar. S.Maqbul Ahmad, Arabic Classical Accounts of India and China, Shimla, 1989, P. 22. Al-Idresi, who travelled Malabar mentions the forests. R.H. Major, Op.Cit., P. XXVI. Besides, Domingo Paes, who travelled Vijaynagar in 1516 AD also mentioned the forests. R.Sowell, En.th., edited, Vasundhara Filliozat, The Vijaynagar Empire, Delhi, 1977, P.18.

⁶⁵ Stamp, Op.Cit., P. 228.

⁶⁶ K. Siddhartha, Op.Cit., P. 135.

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