

## RESISTANCE AND REBELLION: TRIBAL RESPONSES TO BABUR'S RULE

Khalid Bashir<sup>1</sup>, Ishfaq Ahmad Mir<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Senior Assistant Professor of History at Govt. Degree College Kupwara  
Corresponding Email: [khalidhistory222@gmail.com](mailto:khalidhistory222@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*The paper, "Resistance and Rebellion: Tribal Responses to Babur's Rule," provides an insightful look into the most formidable and multi-dimensional challenges for the founder of the Mughal Empire, Babur, in consolidating power over the Indian subcontinent. Tribal responses emerged with the fiercest opposition from various tribes in the form of mounting resistances and rebellions against Babur for the continuation of their independence, traditional customs, and economic power. Some of the causes of tribal resistance include the desire for sovereign existence and cultural identity and even economic and religious reasons. During the early 16th century, the Indian subcontinent comprised separate tribal polities, exercising their range of independence under regional chieftains. Territories within such regions as northwest India and Rajasthan and central India were governed by tribes like the Afghans, Rajputs, Bhils, and Gonds. Their military and political power was an intense counter force to Babur's centralized Mughal state. The most significant uprisings were by Rana Sanga amongst the Rajputs. Afghan tribes in the east launched multiple uprisings to assert their independence. The native people in central India used their strategic locations effectively to resist Babur's advances. This essay seeks to analyze the various dimensions of rebellion and strategic steps that Babur undertakes, ranging from military campaigns to diplomatic efforts and even tribal chiefs entering into his administration. Military subjugation was the very necessity, but Babur's input of assimilating tribal elites through land assignments and other titles also played a crucial role in consolidating his power. These tactics emerged only to suppress the immediate resistance and laid the bases for more sophisticated practices under his successors for the Mughal Empire. This book explores major tribal uprisings and their relevance by showing how such resistance took shape in the political and administrative geography of the early Mughal Empire, and situates this within broader socio-political dynamics in the context of how deep-rooted tribalism was an autonomous nature in early Mughal India.*

**Keywords:** Babur, Mughal Empire, tribal resistance, Rajputs, Afghans, Gonds, Bhils, Battle of Khanwa, Mughal administration, empire-building.

### Introduction

Babur's new empire was not only a tale of military conquest but also one of deep socio-political turbulence. After winning the Battle of Panipat in 1526, he arrived on Indian soil, thereby embarking on a long journey of consolidation into a fractured and fragmented region. One of the most daunting challenges he encountered was the powerful force of tribes who had long been allowed semi-autonomy with major political power in their regions. These tribes, many of whom resisted abandoning their cultural traditions and local administrative systems, were one of the biggest hurdles to Babur's centralization. Tribal opposition to Babur was, therefore, more than a reaction to foreign conquest; it illustrated deep socio-political and economic realities. Many tribes had achieved a degree of economic independence, periodically keeping control over key trade routes or agricultural resources. It was a resistance because of the fear that incorporation by a central authority, such as that under the Mughals, would undermine their new economic independence. Plus, their culture was influenced by principles of locality and kinship.

**RESISTANCE AND REBELLION: TRIBAL RESPONSES TO BABUR'S RULE***Khalid Bashir<sup>1</sup>, Ishfaq Ahmad Mir<sup>2</sup>*

They shared loyalty with local chieftains. Thus, it is a culture which is quite different and contrasted from that of Babur's centralized ruling without any autonomous powers. This paper discusses the tribal opposition dynamics towards Babur, considering influential rebellions and revolts in his early reign. It presents a review of several strategies Babur had adopted in overcoming such resistance: from military actions to diplomatic actions aimed at conviction and incorporation of tribal leaders into the general administrative system of Mughal India. The results of these acts were highly relevant not only for his brief reign but also for the long-term trend of Mughal growth and consolidation in India. An often neglected chapter of early Mughal history will be enlightened by the scrutiny of these instances of tribal resistance and Babur's responses. This analysis speaks to the challenges of governing a divided and stratified polity, while emphasizing the importance of local dynamics in the process of empire-building. Babur's relations with these tribes were far from simple military encounters; they put his capacities for navigating the complicated socio-political texture of the Indian subcontinent to the test—a challenge whose repercussions echoed throughout the subsequent history of Mughal rule.

**The Tribal Landscape of India During Babur's Reign**

In no way was the Indian subcontinent an integrated political entity in the early 16th century; instead, it was a mosaic of diverse ethnic, cultural, and political identities with the tribal communities at the heart of this complex socio-political landscape. Many of the tribal groups operated under quite distinct frameworks, far removed from centralized empires and kingdoms that governed parts of India, ruled by clan-based systems. These states were headed by chiefs of whom power would yield through descent, clan affiliation and control of territory and its resources rather than loyalty to some imperial power. This meant that the independence of these tribal groups was a highly challenging issue for any leader, such as Babur who wanted the centralized government of a state (Gommans, 2002, p. 126; Richards, 1993, p. 23).

Tribal societies at the time of Babur were less likely to undergo subjugation and continued to be strong and independent units. Afghans and Pathans north west, the Rajputs of Rajasthan and smaller tribes in central India had political independence for an extended period of time. Most of these groups had managed to evade subjugation by large powers and were also physically isolated from one another since some regions were unsafe as well as inaccessible (Eraly, 2000, p. 90; Eaton, 1996, p. 75). The Rajputs proved to be a tough rival because of their warrior ethos. The vast principalities of Rajasthan under the Rajputs stoutly resisted Babur's conquest to protect their sovereignty, dignity, and pride. For Babur, this resistance was not merely a threat to his political ambition, but it questioned the worth of the Rajputs and their sense of dignity in power. For the Rajputs, they were merely "defending their martial code and culture" since, as "land protectors," these values were essentially intertwined with their obligations. It culminated in vital resistance from the Rajputs that finally led to the Battle of Khanwa in 1527.

Although the Bhils and Gonds of central India were not militarily organized in anywhere nearly the same way, they were by no means an easy force to overcome either. These tribes had deep religious and cultural attachments to their lands and usually presented a fierce resistance predicated on protecting their sacred territories. Using their knowledge of dense forests and ruined terrain, Bhils and Gonds conducted raids on the Mughal armies, which in turn limited the potential of Babur to expand his dominion into these regions (Eaton, 1996, p. 77). Babar's triumph at the Battle of Panipat in 1526 was a turning point victory that finally resulted in the defeat of Ibrahim Lodi, thereby bringing an end to the Delhi Sultanate. But it was only the beginning of a long-drawn campaign to set up Mughal supremacy; Indian politics remained largely decentralized, and many years would pass before Babur could firmly establish his supremacy. Meanwhile, tribal chieftains and regional rulers wielded a good deal of authority locally. As such, Babur had to navigate a terrain of alliances and rivalries. His military superiority, which largely rested on artillery and cavalry, was insufficient to conquer the tribal groups. Babur understood that militarily capturing tribal forces on the battlefield would not help maintain long-term control over these regions. Accordingly, he resorted to negotiation with local chieftains through diplomacy, bestowing upon

them titles, land grants, and positions of authority in the Mughal administration. Gradually, this assimilation policy decreased organized resistance. This would be the pattern of Mughal rule and furthered by Babur's successors, mostly Akbar, the mastermaneuverer who excelled in forming alliances with influential regional and tribal chieftains, (Eraly, 2000, p. 120; Richards, 1993, p. 144). An understanding of the tribal geography of India under Babur is pivotal to understanding the challenges he faced in consolidating Mughal power. Resistance was a continuum but one deeply embedded in already existing socio-political structures predating Babur. These tribes largely influenced the early years of the Mughal Empire, effectively because of their independence, martial traditions, and loyal commitment to local chieftains. Babur's triumph over these obstacles created the groundwork for the Mughal empire's subsequent growth and stabilisation across the subcontinent.

### **Cultural Autonomy and Local Sovereignty**

A hallmark of tribal resistance against Babur was the defense of cultural autonomy. Tribal groups, whether in the deserts of Rajasthan, the forests of Central India, or the hills of the northwest, developed distinct social and cultural systems that were deeply intertwined with their political structures. They passionately believed in self-governance, maintaining their judicial, religious, and economic systems. Tribal chiefs embodied a duality: as warlords, they were also protectors of their people's traditions (Eaton, 1996, p. 78; Richards, 1993, p. 57). Babur's invasion and efforts to extend Mughal influence constituted a significant political threat—an attack on the social values that had been established over generations.

Among the most vocal and cohesive tribal groups were the Rajputs, who exhibited fierce resistance to Babur's centralization efforts. Rajput society was marked by a rigid hierarchy, emphasizing martial prowess and loyalty above all else. Leadership among the Rajputs was hereditary, and the chieftains commanded absolute loyalty from their clans. The cultural pride and fierce independence of the Rajputs ignited their unwillingness to yield to the authority of a foreign ruler, especially Babur, whom they considered an outsider and aggressor from Central Asia, rather than a rightful ruler of the Indian subcontinent (Gommans, 2002, p. 134). The Rajput resistance was driven primarily by their aspiration to preserve their sovereignty, territorial control, and warrior identity.

Despite Babur's significant military triumphs, such as the Battle of Khanwa in 1527, Rajput resistance remained unabated. While Babur's victory dealt a serious setback to Rajput forces, their leaders and warriors refused to renounce their autonomy. They resorted to guerrilla warfare, ambushes, and sporadic uprisings, indicating that the struggle for independence continued throughout Babur's rule (Eraly, 2000, p. 102; Richards, 1993, p. 145). This enduring resistance symbolized both cultural and political autonomy for the Rajputs and other tribal groups. Their opposition to Babur was not solely a reaction to military incursions; rather, it stemmed from deeply ingrained cultural traditions that underscored their identity. Even when Babur managed to integrate some tribal groups into his expanding empire, he faced considerable resistance from those for whom cultural heritage and identity took precedence over submission to centralized imperial authority.

### **Geographic Isolation and Military Traditions**

Geographical inaccessibility was one of the factors that made tribal regions very resisting to Mughal authority. Tribal populations inhabiting mountainous terrains, Central Indian forests, hill tracts in the Deccan and northwest frontier were often situated in areas inaccessible to central control. It gave tribes an opportunity for keeping themselves separate from the direct imperial oversight. Conversely, in northern India, the agrarian heartlands were territories of Mughal power, secured through control over cities and agricultural revenue. In contrast, tribal regions stood on a different plane; tribal economies were

**RESISTANCE AND REBELLION: TRIBAL RESPONSES TO BABUR'S RULE***Khalid Bashir<sup>1</sup>, Ishfaq Ahmad Mir<sup>2</sup>*

mostly based on subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, and small-scale trade, making them wholly less reliant on the broader market systems to which empires like the Mughals aspired to give form. Besides, most of these tribal societies had strong fighting traditions over many centuries by protecting their homelands from foreign conquerors. The Rajputs were master cavalry fighters while the Gonds and Bhils of Central India were guerrilla warfare experts. Such a warrior-oriented culture was hard to crush with mere military tactics. Although Babur's troops were technologically better equipped, as they fruitfully used gunpowder and artillery, these unorthodox tactics often proved troublesome for them. The Rajputs effectively used local topography to launch surprise attacks followed by a retreat to safe fortifications. Such strategies considerably helped in the initial phases of the expansion of Mughals, as they frustrated Babur's schemes of centralized control and called for extended military combats rather than quick and decisive victories.

**Political Fragmentation and Alliances**

Indian politics was further diversified, making it challenging for Babur to deal with. He was previously exposed to centralised administrations in Central Asia; that is a stark contrast to the early 16th Indian political system, which was decentralized, has many regional powers, and tribal communities (Richards, 1993; Gommans, 2002). Even after Babur's decisive victory at Panipat, which turned out to be the effective fall of the Delhi Sultanate, he found himself entangled in the complicated web of regional rulers, tribal chiefs, and half-autonomous politics that exercised different levels of autonomy (Mukhia, 2004; Eraly, 2000).

Tribal societies typically interacted with the local state through a network of alliances in diplomacy, strategic marriages, military alliance, and trade relations (Bashir, 2019; Sinha, 2006). The Rajputs, due to their chivalry and respect for antecedent traditions, have a history of alliance and rivalry with other regional kingdoms, positioning them in changing power relations and regional politics (Singh, 2018; Khan, 2016). Such complex interdependence was a critical factor discouraging the consolidation of Babur's unified command over the tribal territories. Military triumphs were not limited to direct hostility but also encountered due to the intricate patterns of association linking these tribes with the powerful regional chiefs (Eaton, 1996). Babur relied on the combination of military coercion and diplomatic approach to effectively suppress tribal resistance.

Since raw power was likely to deliver short-term supremacy, Babur sought to bring influential tribal chiefs on board through the policy of alliance and induction into the administrative circles of the Mughal government framework. However, this foreign policy affair elicited mixed reactions. For most of them, the arrival of the Mughals was an affront since it broke the tradition ways of governance and the patterns they used to exercise authority (Khan, 2010; Lal, 2013). In tribal societies, kinship ties and forms of local governance dominated, hence the inability of Mughal's central bureaucracy imperialism to assume (Gommans, 2002; Siddiqi, 2008). The governance of Babur, specifically the tribal relations, captures that power was either embedded with diplomacy as shown by the depth of the challenge of governing a fractured political environment (Singh, 1964; Eraly, 2000). Governance in early modern India required any power consolidator to be very sensitive to the divisions and local alliances that defined dynamics.

**The Persistence of Tribal Resistance**

Tribal resistance long outlived the early successes of Babur in the Mughal Empire in the following decades. It was inspired by responses to Babur's military campaigns, but also by an aversion to protect long-standing systems in culture, politics, and economics. This power plays of tribes, such as the Rajputs, Gonds, and Bhils-as an ethnic chieftain and a proud warrior-were shown to an always present type of resistance against Mughal rule (Mishra, 2015; Richards, 1993).

Though his successors, and particularly Akbar, would eventually incorporate many tribal chieftains into the Mughal administrative framework through policies of *sulh-i-kul* universal peace and jagirs land assignments, it was neither swift nor easy (Gommans, 2002; Khan, 2010). Akbar's attempts at assimilation of tribal elites in the broader framework of the empire marked a strategic turn, but the existence of tribal factions brought to light the humongous task of governance in India's complex political landscape (Bashir, 2019).

The unabated tribal uprisings, in the days of Babur and during the early years of Mughal rule, were a testament to the deep-rooted autonomy of the tribes in India and the limitations that existed for authority being centralized (Eraly, 2000; Singh, 2018). This event, therefore, was not a situation of mere revolt but symptomatic of far more complex trends within the socio-political existence of early modern India that was beset by endless battles between local autonomy and imperial ambitions. Lastly, the resistance Babur encountered from the Rajputs, the Gonds, and the Bhils exposes deep fissures in the structures of governance under the early Mughal. These dynamics reflect the steady struggle between the exercise of centralized authority and the recognition of regional identities and local governance systems that precede Mughal rule. The complexity found in these dynamics improves our understanding of the substantial obstacles that existed in early modern India as Mughal Empire motivations collide with deeply ingrained local identities and autonomy (Bhattacharya, 2007; Khan, 2016).

### **Economic Interests as a Catalyst for Tribal Resistance**

Economic interests were a highly significant impetus to tribal resistance against Babur's attempt to assert Mughal hegemony over the Indian subcontinent. For most of these tribes, economic survival was interdependent on the systems of land control, taxation, and trade that they carefully kept afloat. These frameworks were not only material sustenance to these tribes but also undergirded their social structures and political autonomy (Gommans, 2002; Khan, 2010). The imposition of centralized Mughal administration threatened tribal networks that operated at the time; therefore, tribal leaders put up military resistance to protect their economic interests (Richards, 1993; Eraly, 2000). Therefore, the tribal response was not only a defense of the land but was the greater struggle to preserve socio-economic systems against encroaching imperial authority, which also exemplifies governance and traditional autonomy during early Mughal periods (Bashir, 2019; Sinha, 2006).

### **Regional Economic Autonomy and Tribal Resistance**

Regions such as Gujarat, Malwa, and the Deccan had developed nuanced resource-use structures, trade patterns, and taxation regimes supporting regional economies (Richards, 1993; Khan, 2010). Here, tribal leaders were both political and economic administrators with managing fertile soil, running water systems, and exercising control over the passage of goods through routes that linked them to wider regional economies (Eraly, 2000; Gommans, 2002). This, according to Bashir in 2019, allows the independence of tribes to maintain economic independence from the dominance of larger empires and centralist states. For instance, the state of Gujarat had long been an important commercial center in maritime commerce while most of the tribes occupying this region were substantial players in that economic field, mainly due to control over land routes and local produces, Mishra, 2015.

In like manner, tribal politics in the Malwa and the Deccan were highly interwoven with regional agricultural productions as well as networks of craft production (Sinha, 2006). These attempts to integrate the regions into the Mughal imperial economy directly threatened the economic livelihoods of the peoples. New tax systems that were centralizing land control, frustrated indigenous trade networks, as tribal leaders saw this as a ploy to take away their powers and authority in the economic sectors (Richards, 1993; Eraly, 2000). This pressure on local governance and structures economically did not

**RESISTANCE AND REBELLION: TRIBAL RESPONSES TO BABUR'S RULE***Khalid Bashir<sup>1</sup>, Ishfaq Ahmad Mir<sup>2</sup>*

only lead to the loss of political independence but also the very existence of such communities. Thus, most of the tribal chiefs organized their arms to stand in the way of Mughal advances and framed their resistance in the roles of protecting sovereignty and traditional economic power.

**The Afghan Tribes and Economic Resistance**

The most prominent examples of tribal resistance to Babur's rule were the Afghan tribes of the northwestern frontier, on grounds of economic interest. Established forces in both political and economic domains of the region, tribes like Yusufzais, Khattaks, and Rohilla Pathans controlled strategic trade routes and rich agricultural lands, thus exercising great power. In addition, various Afghan tribes had acquired riches from long-distance trade, particularly at the Khyber Pass, which could connect Central Asia directly to the Indian subcontinent (Richards, 1993, p. 55; Eraly, 2000, p. 120). The tribal leaders of Afghanistan opposed Babur's consolidation of power in their respective territories since his successes threatened their economic autonomy.

The other parts of the empire were still relatively underdeveloped in agriculture, while taxing the Afghan regions was challenging due to the geography of the region, which encouraged decentralization (Gommans, 2002, p. 145; Singh, 1964, p. 143). The economic autonomy of the tribal chiefs is based on pastoralism, minor farming, and the control of several trade routes. The Afghan resistance to Babur was essentially tied to the defense of economic interests. Tribal leaders entrenched in spheres of influence for centuries perceived Mughal control as impinging upon revenues extracted from the territories they administered and authority over local commerce. The Rohilla Pathans especially, their economic assertion was marked by this specific image—they were always spawning insurgencies and fighting for maintaining martial dominance over their economic capital, resisting foreign penetration at all costs. The incessant rebellions left no option but to commit a lot of military resources and financial efforts in the battles against these adversaries, which showed a high level of economic autonomy.

**Land Control and Taxation Systems**

The economic incentives of tribal resistance are very much tied to control over land as well as taxation thereof. Such factors play a crucial role in the survival and continuation of tribal societies. For most tribes, their property rights over land represent political authority and form the very bedrock of their economic well-being. Tribal chiefs operated quasi monarchically over their fiefs, being in control of agricultural produce, local resources, and revenues, which were further dispensed among the people. This was a set up that allowed tribal chiefs to have social cohesion and military power since they could sustain their armies and keep their subjects in line with the revenues acquired from land ownership (Gommans, 2002, p. 147; Eraly, 2000, p. 127). The attempts of Babur in establishing the Mughal system of centralized revenue collection came up against the very tribal structure in economic terms.

The foundation of the Mughal system rested in the agrarian surplus they could extract, which relied deeply upon a developed structure of land grants and taxation. The establishment of such a system presupposed control over agricultural resources and a bureaucratic apparatus for revenue collection. Such was perceived as trenchant violations of customary economic privileges exercised by tribal chieftains. The installation of Mughal tax collectors and the setting aside of potentially lucrative lands for loyalists and reorganization of regional economic networks represented an attempt to whittle away at the powers of tribal leaders to regulate their economies. Therefore, tribal chieftains often led guerrilla attacks with military power to challenge the conquests of Mughals. Sometimes, tribal chiefs also started negotiations with Mughals to maintain their economic independence under the nominal suzerainty of the Mughals. However, this was a laborious process because such surrender was considered unacceptable to the Mughals, for they were concerned that they might lose control over the recently conquered lands (Eraly, 2000, p. 130; Gommans, 2002, p. 150).



## Trade Networks and Economic Self-Sufficiency

Another important aspect of tribal economic resistance was protecting integral trade networks necessary for self-sufficiency. An integrated network of trade in most tribal communities—albeit those with a geographically dispersed base—made them maintain independence from the imperial economy. Mostly, these trade nets were comprised of local goods that made up textiles, spices, raw materials, neighboring regions, and even distant markets in Central Asia and the Middle East (Mishra, 2015; Richards, 1993). Babur's economic integration programs were an open challenge to the trade-dependent tribes that had, for long enough, enjoyed some level of autonomy in the economic sphere. The imposition of Mughal authority on trade routes and attempts to shift the traded commodities into Mughal-controlled markets substantially weakened the economic base of many tribal communities.

This threat caused tribal leaders to orchestrate raids and blockades of Mughal trade networks with the purpose of inflicting economic sabotage as a force to guarantee their independence (Sinha, 2006; Eraly, 2000). It is, therefore, conceived that tribal resistance against Babur's rule was not limited to the factors of establishing sovereignty but a call for self-sufficiency, with a more subtle undertone of the saga of resistance. In such societies, trading networks had to be maintained; it was a whole lot more than an exercise in economics. The interdependent economies of localities were the bedrocks on which tribal existence rested and disrupting these systems became the urgent order of the day. A study of Babur's struggle for consolidation brings forth a larger theme of resistance to an empire's incursion into socio-economic conceptions.

## Religious Identity and Loyalty

Religious identity henceforth imbued and defined the resistance of tribal groups against Babur's rule by integrating political sovereignty into cultural autonomy. The process perhaps is best told by an example of the Rajputs. Their war ethos was resonating very fundamental, time-honored traditions rooted in Hindu ideology that seemed to fuel their opposition. This resistance, often led by leaders such as Rana Sanga of Mewar, discussed their battle in the language of dharmayuddha or just and righteous war to defend their holy land and dignity. For the Rajputs, the Mughal expansion was an imposition of foreign rule on their cultural and religious life. Babur might have vanquished them at Khanwa in 1527, but that did not end Rajput resistance. The interrelation between religion and revolt then enabled the Rajput princes to enter into guerrilla warfare and sporadic revolts, which ultimately demonstrated that the Mughal attempts to subdue them succeeded only partially. Later rulers attempted to institutionalize relationships by political marriages and diplomacy (Singh, 2017, p. 42; Richards, 1993, p. 54).

Similarly, Babur's campaigns represented an assault not just on the political geographies of such local tribes as the Bhils and Gonds but also on the sacred spaces that defined their religious selves. The Bhils and Gonds were animistic/nature-based faith communities for whom land had deep spiritual values. The forests, hills, and rivers they had regarded as part of their sanctified world were all crucial to their ceremonies and worldview; therefore, the incursions by Mughals were a kind of desecration of those spaces. In particular, the Bhils battled fiercely in the forests of Rajasthan, whom they believed was their spiritual home at risk due to the Mughals. Equally determined to protect their political and religious entity, Gonds also succeeded in consolidating political and religious authority at different times. This play of religious identity and resistance created a significant barrier to the integration of power across the subcontinent that Babur had embarked on during his initial years: Eaton, 1996, p. 73; Habib, 1999, p. 89. For the Rajputs and many native Indians, the struggle against Mughal rule was as much a clash for their cultural and religious lifeways as it was political. The saliency of religious ties therefore provided both strength and cohesion for the resistance, prolonging the process of Mughal annexation within tribal

*Khalid Bashir<sup>1</sup>, Ishfaq Ahmad Mir<sup>2</sup>*

regions and complicating the narrative surrounding those efforts in the formative period of the Mughal Empire.

### **Specific Instances of Tribal Resistance**

A number of key moments of tribal opposition arose within Babur's India invasion that threatened seriously to check the consolidation of his power. The most important one was the Rajput uprising under the leadership of Rana Sanga of Mewar. The combination of local chieftains, banded together under the leadership of Rana Sanga, was overcome decisively by Babur in the Battle of Panipat in 1526—a battle that seemed to defeat the very hopes of the Rajputs. The Battle of Khanwa in 1527 became a turning point for Babur's expedition. Although crucial to Babur's victory was the apt usage by him of advanced artillery, along with the well-trained infantry, the fight itself was long and harsh, showcasing the fierce resistance from Rajput forces. To make this fight a symbol of Mughal military supremacy and stabilize his rule in Northern India, Babur saw battle as the prime opportunity. Khanwa may have foiled the immediate military alliance led by Rana Sanga, but it did not crush Rajput resistance altogether; chieftains continued to struggle against Mughal authority, taking to guerrilla warfare from the bases they had established in Rajasthan. These isolated revolts epitomized the intense opposition of the Rajputs and their commitment to independence. The successors of Babur, particularly Akbar, soon learned that the Rajputs could not be secured simply by conquests. They had to adapt tactics that integrated military power with diplomatic and marital strategy for the sustainability of stability in Rajasthan (Gommans, 2002, p. 132; Richards, 1993, p. 144).

Besides the Rajput resistance, Afghan tribes in eastern India was an important antagonist of Babur. Bihar and Bengal became key provinces of Afghan tribal chiefs who vigorously opposed the Mughal invasion as many had already established local kingdoms for a long time. These tracts were once under Afghan rule and the leaders within those areas assumed the titles of princes and were reluctant to yield to Babur. Figures like Sher Shah Suri, however, emerged from this context of resistance and eventually turned into powers that successfully resisted the expansion of the Mughals. Sher Shah had a strategic appreciation of the military tactics required to counter a superior force and knowledge of the ground to use against the descendants of Babur. His resistance led to an Afghan uprising that aimed at reasserting Afghan superiority in eastern India, and the latter's advance was thus temporarily checked (Eraly, 2000, p. 87). Resistance was not confined only to the Rajputs and Afghans but also included other significant native forces such as the Bhils and Gonds of Central India. Since the attachment of tribal people to their land was fundamentally spiritual, the decentralized nature of the tribal society created further headaches for Babur in extending control for the Mughal.

The Bhils and Gonds aptly exploited this region's dense forests and uneven terrain by making continuous raids on Mughal supply lines and military camps. Their expertise in local geography helped them to fight in a directionally disproportionate way against Mughal attempts to have an absolute control over such territories. Lacking the well-organized armies of the Rajputs or Afghans, these tribes successfully riveted Mughal administration through their steady opposition (Singh, 1964, p. 98; Eaton, 1996, p. 73). Facing this diverse and determined opposition, Babur was compelled to design a plan that was multi-dimensional to establish his rule. Military prowess notwithstanding, Babur understood that a strong rule was more than victory in battle. For Babur, the victory at Khanwa was symbolic of everything he wanted his state to be: victorious and inimitable. Through conquest over the Rajputs, Babur sought to demonstrate Mughal invincibility.

However, he also knew the limits up to which coercion was feasible, especially with local elites who had the keys to distribution of local resources and loyalty. Thus, Babur's diplomatic engagement became an integral part of his strategy. He could induct chieftains into his administration by providing them with titles, grants of land and power. The policy of degrees reduced organised opposition while helping Babur occupy strategic territories without involving himself in long-drawn military campaigns.



In other words, tribal resistance to Babur's rule was born out of deep-rooted political, economic, and cultural challenges. The opposition emerged from Rajput warriors in Rajasthan to Afghan chieftains in the East and native tribes of Central India. Although Babur had his critical victories at Khanwa, regional autonomy and local identities remained formidable obstacles to the establishment of unified Mughal rule. Only if the skillful tribal groups were to be successfully assimilated into the framework of Mughal governance would his successors have to streamline and improve Babur's administrative policies.

## Conclusion

The most potent challenge to Babur's Mughal Empire in India emanated from the tribal resistance. These comprised the Rajputs, Afghans and the locals like Bhils and Gonds, who took pride in the regional subcultures, therefore resisting their independence unequivocally. The local tribes exercised political self-governance through an extremely complicated network of regional administration, tenure, and traditions. Babur's centralizing administrative framework and his imperial ambitions directly posed a threat to this autonomy, causing much trouble.

Above all, the Rajputs represented a deep-seated resistance that was essentially spurred by the ethos of the warrior, by their cultural identity, and by their longings to rule over their lands. The war at Khanwa in 1527 was militarily successful for Babur but failed to consummate Rajput resistance at large; instead, the chieftains of the Rajputs continued conducting guerrilla warfare from their fortresses, which vividly shows how deep resistance had been instilled. Similar tribals within the eastern regions of Bihar and Bengal prevented Mughal conquest, not only for self-rule, but for defense and preservation of their economic and political power. One of the great leaders produced out from the resistance was Sher Shah Suri, who actively led the resistance against Mughal rulers while constantly improving his administrative reforms (Gommans, 2002, p. 132; Eraly, 2000, p. 87).

The consolidation was thwarted by the Bhils and Gonds, among others, as these forces launched successful raids on the supply lines of the Mughal Empire by exploiting the geographical complexity of Central India. Political inspiration characterized their high degrees of resistance but also reflects their spiritual and cultural bonds with the land that they felt Babur's centralization threatened (Singh 1964, p. 98; Eaton 1996, p. 73). In the end, however, Babur's strategy of war was not good enough to tackle the fluid tribal resistance for its complexity. While the Mughal force was beyond his control, he mastered the subtler art of diplomacy to co-opt the tribal leaders into the Mughal framework. It became possible because he clipped their recalcitrance in return for titles, grants of land, and administrative posts. The combination of military power and political concessions began to characterize the rule of the Mughals; their successors, more particularly Akbar, developed this blend with greater expertise.

From here, leveraging the models of Babur, Akbar developed and refined the practice of absorbing powerful tribal polities, most famously, the Rajputs into the Mughal administrative and military infrastructure, forming alliances crucial to the security and expansion of empire (Richards, 1993, p. 144; Gommans, 2002, p. 132). In this manner, Babur's handling of the tribal resistance determined both his short-term fate and provides critical foundations for the developing Mughal administrative apparatus. This balance between force and diplomacy would become a hallmark of Mughal rule, as successive emperors had to navigate the complex web of relations between the central state and the tribal groups inhabiting India. This dynamic played a vital role in the consolidation and strengthening of the Mughal Empire, an empire where emperors could expand dominion without entirely dismantling the regional forces governing these territories for centuries.

## Literature Review

Accounts of Babur's founding of the Mughal Empire in India often center on his tactics, or diplomacy. The trend of scholarship, however, will inevitably turn to tribal responses to his rule. Tribal

**RESISTANCE AND REBELLION: TRIBAL RESPONSES TO BABUR'S RULE***Khalid Bashir<sup>1</sup>, Ishfaq Ahmad Mir<sup>2</sup>*

resistance destroys the idealized figure of Babur as an invincible conqueror, giving instead a more intricate understanding of the socio-political landscape in India of the first half of the 16th century. From early historians such as Jean Aubin to Satish Chandra, there are studies on the contacts between aborigines and alien rulers. Satish Chandra has particularly highlighted the role of tribes with a great degree of agency and strategic resistance. After them came Eric Stokes, Irfan Habib, and the like, focusing increasingly on the economic dimensions of Mughal policies, especially re-enactment of land redistribution and taxation measures that created resentment among tribal peoples. Various literature-by such authors as Richard Eaton and Francis Robinson-called for the belief that Babur's cultural policies-the very same policies he deliberately implemented-had the unintended consequence of provoking tribal opposition because these groups wanted to preserve their identities in the face of Mughal dominance.

**Findings**

Responses of tribes towards Babur's rule fall into broad categories of resistance forms, including armed uprisings, play of diplomacy, and cultural adjustments, thus revealing the scope of agency put across by the tribes.

**Armed Mutinies:** Narrations of how various tribes revolted against the Mughal administration since they had a burning desire for freedom and, therefore, not to be shaken from their traditional mode of life. The Rajput resistance comes in as one of the movements in this line; it was led by a number of leaders using guerrilla warfare against the forces of Babur. The fights culminated in the battle of Khanwa in 1527 and Panipat in 1529.

**Political Machinations:** Tribal chieftains and heads used diplomacy as one of the tactics of resistance. In fact, certain tribal fractions allied themselves temporarily with Babur, believing that such alliances could serve as a bargaining chip against other fractions, or when they wanted relatively lenient terms for engagement, which reflected pragmatic governance tactics.

**Cultural Adaptations:** The Confluence of Tribal Traditions and Mughal Politics Did need very delicate negotiations over identity matters. Elements of Mughal culture found their place, but others put up resistance by allowing nuanced expressions of tribal identities within the broader imperial matrix.

**Methodology**

This paper will be qualitative based on historical texts, authentic accounts, and secondary literature as closely related to the relations of tribes and tribes' relation with the rule of Babur. Sources include:

**Primary Sources:** Babur nama along with letters by chiefs of tribes are rich in opinion about the customary practice of their respective regions and response of these tribes toward Babur's rule.

**Secondary Literature:** This encompasses an integrated review of journal articles, monographs and other historical analyses with the result of giving a multidimensional perspective of tribal dynamics. The literature is critically reviewed to identify gaps and inconsistencies into the record concerning the nature of tribal responses.

**Comparative Analysis:** Responses during Babur's rule are compared with the responses of successive Mughal emperors in the direction of a better understanding of continuity and change in tribal resistance in this time period.

**Review of Historiography** The historiography about resistance to Babur's rule has been diametrically modified over time. In earlier narratives, Babur is still read and presented mainly as a heroic figure-besides military and political brilliance-of other such qualities that make him acceptable or even praiseworthy. Contemporary historians increasingly recognize the agency of the tribal groups in contrast to the earlier simplistic characterizations of their responses. While previous scholarship primarily focused on the military material, the same occurrences have, in recent interpretations, been contextualized within larger, broader socio-political frameworks. Questions that previous historians avoided when writing on the lives of the marginalized groups have, therefore, caused a swing into social history, expanding the discussion of Babur's reign even further. It represents a basic reevaluation of the historical narratives of

empire-building from the perspective of merely acknowledging conquerors to recognizing acts of resistance by locals.

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