

## THE DEPICTION OF INDIA IN "BABURNAMA"

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### Abstract

Baburnama, written by Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, is one of the most important historical-biographical sources of its time. In this work, Babur provides detailed descriptions of the regions he conquered, particularly India. He offers valuable information about India's natural geography, climate, the lifestyle of its inhabitants, culture, traditions, and political environment. This article deeply analyzes the depiction of India in Baburnama and compares it with modern historical research.

**Keywords:** Baburnama, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, India, natural geography, climate, flora and fauna, population, culture, traditions, historical source, linguistic analysis, historical analysis, ethnography, civilization, Oriental studies.

### Introduction

Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur was not only a great commander but also a historian, poet, and scholar. In his renowned work Baburnama, he vividly and accurately described the lands he ruled, their nature, people, and cultures. His depiction of India, in particular, is extensive, and he views the country with both admiration and criticism.

This article analyzes Babur's depiction of India in Baburnama. His views on India's nature, climate, water resources, flora and fauna, as well as the customs and lifestyle of its people, are examined through an analytical approach.

In 1526, Babur defeated the Indian Sultan Ibrahim Lodi at the Battle of Panipat and established the Timurid dynasty in India. However, he recorded that he felt like a stranger in this new land and found it difficult to adapt to its nature, climate, people, culture, and traditions.

Babur entered India after the Battle of Panipat in 1526 and studied its political situation. He noted that Ibrahim Lodi was ruling India but that the country was plagued by internal conflicts and fragmentation.

— "Ibrahim Lodi's army was incredibly large, but he lacked leadership skills. Each noble acted independently, and there was no centralized authority."

According to Tabaqat-i Nasiri, Sultan Shahabuddin Ghori once marched into India with an army of 120,000 soldiers. His enemies were various rajas and kings, as India at that time was not under the rule of a single authority.

Babur also provides information about the rulers who governed India before him. When Babur entered India, Delhi was its capital, and in the year he conquered the country, there were five Muslim and two non-Muslim kings ruling different regions. Babur observed that India lacked a stable central government, which made it relatively easier to establish the Timurid state. Through his rule, he attempted to introduce a centralized administration.

Babur launched five military campaigns to conquer India. He finally entered the country in 1526, but he had been making efforts for seven to eight years before that. Regarding this, he wrote:

**"From that year until the year 932 (1526), I earnestly pursued the conquest of India. Over seven to eight years, I launched five military expeditions. On the fifth attempt, by the grace of Almighty God, the enemy Sultan Ibrahim was crushed by divine wrath, and the vast land of India was granted to me and was subdued."**

When describing Indian society, Babur noted its hierarchical divisions and the presence of various religions and beliefs. He also highlighted the differences between Hindus and Muslims:

— "India's population is vast; every city and village is full of people."

— "Here, people worship numerous gods, and everyone follows their own faith."

— "The customs of the Indian people are entirely different from ours. They perform ablutions in open spaces, walk barefoot, and do not bake bread."

Babur compared Indian society with that of Mawarannahr and the Turco-Mongol traditions. He also pointed out the differences between Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.

**Babur's Observations on India's Economic, Geographical, and Climatic Conditions**

Babur provides valuable insights into India's economic condition, documenting its natural resources, agriculture, and trade.

— "Agriculture is widely practiced in India. Rice is the most commonly grown crop."

— "Gold and silver are abundant in this land, and the markets are crowded every day."

— "India's land is fertile, but the people are mostly engaged in craftsmanship."

Babur acknowledged India's economic prosperity, particularly the development of trade and handicrafts.

Babur criticized the shortcomings of the Indian army, particularly their disorderly warfare tactics.

— "The armies of Indian sultans are vast, but they lack discipline; each soldier moves independently."

— "Elephants are widely used, but they are not always effective in battle."

He pointed out that despite the numerical strength of Indian forces, they were tactically weak. Regarding the use of elephants, he had mixed opinions: while acknowledging their power, he also emphasized that they were not always strategically advantageous.

### **India's Historical Context**

While Baburnama does not provide direct historical accounts of India's origins, Babur offers detailed descriptions of India's 15th- and 16th-century political, economic, and cultural landscape. He viewed India as a wealthy and developed country but found its climate and customs foreign. His writings remain significant historical sources, and many of his observations were later confirmed during the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir.

### **India's Geography and Nature**

Babur describes India's geographical features, noting its vast size, large population, and fertile lands. He mentions that India is bordered by the ocean on its east, south, and even parts of the west. In the north, it is surrounded by mountains, including the Hindu Kush, Kafiristan, and Kashmir ranges, while Kabul, Ghazni, and Kandahar lie to the northwest.

When comparing India to his homeland, Babur emphasizes its distinctiveness. Everything—from its mountains and rivers to its forests and deserts, cities and provinces, animals and plants, people and language, rain and wind—differs from what he was accustomed to.

The warm regions near Kabul share some similarities with India, but in many ways, they remain distinct. Babur notes that once one crosses the Indus River, everything changes—landscapes, water sources, trees, rocks, people, roads, and customs—all uniquely Indian. He also describes regions under Kashmiri control located beyond the Indus.

### **Water Resources and Agriculture**

One interesting fact Babur mentions is the scarcity of flowing water in India. While some cities could dig canals for irrigation, they did not do so. One reason for this was that there was little need for irrigation, as the autumn harvest matured with seasonal rains. Interestingly, spring crops could still yield produce even without rainfall.

### **Indian Cities and Provinces**

Babur comments on the structure of Indian cities and towns, describing them as lacking in beauty. He attributes this to their uniform architecture and the absence of walled gardens. Moreover, the banks of some rivers and canals eroded due to seasonal rains, making crossings difficult. Certain rural areas were covered in thick forests, where people would hide to evade tax payments.

### **India's Climate**

Babur describes India as a vast and fertile land with a notably warm climate.

— "The climate of India is hot. Winter is barely noticeable, and rainfall mostly occurs during the summer months."

India's climate posed challenges not only to Babur and his soldiers but also to the native inhabitants.

— "Departing from Dundan, we arrived at Aropar. While in Aropar, heavy rains fell, and it became quite cold. Many destitute Indians perished."

### **Rivers and Water Bodies**

Babur provides detailed descriptions of India's rivers and water bodies, particularly highlighting the importance of the Ganges River.

During the events of 1525-1526, Babur describes an unusual sight in India:

— "When we reached the Khattiy Gakkar region, we saw that an irrigation canal had accumulated large pools of water in several places. This water had completely frozen, though the ice was not very thick, about the width of a finger. Such ice is extremely rare in India. In all the years we lived in India, we never saw snow or ice anywhere else."

### **New Terminologies Discovered by Babur**

During his conquest of India, Babur encountered and recorded several unique terms used by the locals:

**Shabikhuni:** A term referring to nighttime attacks by Indians, where they would set fire to tents and residences, creating chaos.

**Dun:** The Indian word for meadow or pasture. Babur remarked, "Dun is an extraordinary grassland."

**Badxandi:** A term referring to mercenaries who were hired for a fixed period during wars.

### **Seasonal Differences Between India and Babur's Homeland**

One of the key distinctions Babur noted was the difference in seasons. Unlike his homeland, where there were four distinct seasons, India had only three:

- Four months of summer
- Four months of the rainy season (Pashakaal)
- Four months of winter

Each season was further divided into two sub-periods. For example:

The last two months of summer (Jeth and Asar) were the hottest.

The first two months of the rainy season (Saavan and Bhadoon) received the heaviest rainfall.

The middle two months of winter (Pus and Magh) were the coldest.

This classification effectively created six climatic phases in India's annual cycle.

### **Description of Flora and Fauna**

Bobur paid special attention to the flora and fauna of India. He described various plants growing in the region, including mango, banana, rice (sholigugurt), and other fruit and crop varieties. He also wrote about the animals found in India, particularly elephants and crocodiles.

Example:

"India has many strange plants. For instance, instead of the narcissus flower, there is another flower that has the same scent but a different shape."

India is home to animals that are unique to the region. One of the wild animals is the elephant, which the Indians call "xaatiy." The locals are responsible for each elephant in front of the government offices. Indeed, the elephant is a massive and intelligent creature. It understands commands and follows instructions. The price of an elephant is determined by its size—the larger the elephant, the higher its value.

Bobur observed the richness and diversity of Indian flora. He noted that many trees and fruits in India were not found in Central Asia. For instance, mango, betel leaf, banana, coconut palm, and others. His writings show that the flora of India was vastly different from that of Central Asia. He closely observed the new plants and described their characteristics. He was particularly fascinated by the abundance of tropical fruits and plants.

Bobur's descriptions of India's fauna reflect his keen interest in animals. He wrote in detail about elephants and tigers, explaining their roles in military and social life. He also noted the large number of monkeys and snakes in India.

### **Population and Lifestyle**

Bobur also paid attention to the lifestyle, traditions, and culture of the Indian people. He described their clothing, occupations, and social structure.

Example:

"Indians usually walk barefoot, and their clothes are light and simple. Most of them live in villages and engage in agriculture."

Bobur did not consider India to be a particularly beautiful land. He pointed out that its people lacked physical beauty and that they were unfamiliar with customs such as mutual hospitality and social

interaction. He also mentioned that ordinary people and the lower classes often walked around almost naked, wearing only a small cloth tied around their waists.

Despite this, he acknowledged one positive aspect of India: the abundance of skilled laborers and artisans. In fact, Mulla Sharaf, in *Zafarnama*, mentioned that the construction of Amir Temur's Masjidi Sang was largely carried out by Indian, Persian, and Azerbaijani stone carvers.

Bobur also wrote about the religious beliefs of Indians and compared their way of life to his own Turkic-Mughal culture.

### **Bobur's Subjective View on India**

While writing about India, Bobur sometimes assessed it critically. In his view, India's nature was beautiful, but its climate was harsh. He also admitted that he could not fully understand some of the customs of the Indian people.

Example:

"There is no concept of breakfast in India; they eat whenever they want."

However, he also acknowledged India's rich cultural heritage, its developed arts, and its thriving trade. Bobur's *Boburnama* serves not only as a historical record but also as an important source of geographic, cultural, and ethnographic knowledge. He provided a detailed account of India's nature, climate, flora, and fauna, as well as the lifestyle and traditions of its people.

Bobur's opinions about India were sometimes positive and sometimes critical, but he recognized the country's wealth and diversity. This aspect of *Boburnama* remains valuable for studying Indian history even today.

*Boburnama* is not just a historical and literary work but also a valuable source of information on India's nature, climate, flora, and fauna during the 15th and 16th centuries. Bobur meticulously documented his observations, comparing India's natural resources with those of Central Asia.

His approach to depicting India was comprehensive and can be analyzed using various methods, including historical, ethnographic, linguistic, and geographic studies. Along with descriptions of India's nature, climate, flora, and fauna, the work also provides insights into the daily life, customs, and culture of the local people.

From a botanical perspective, he highlighted plants such as mango, rice, betel leaf, banana, coconut palm, and cotton cultivation. He acknowledged the fertility of India's land but found its climate too hot and humid for his liking.

In terms of fauna, Bobur provided valuable observations on the role of elephants in warfare and agriculture, the dangers posed by tigers, the abundance of monkeys, and the presence of crocodiles, cobras, eagles, and other rare animals.

The book also shows how India's natural conditions influenced not only agriculture but also military strategy. Bobur's descriptions were later confirmed by his successors, particularly Akbar and Jahangir, further increasing *Boburnama's* historical and scholarly significance.

Thus, *Boburnama* is not only a historical record but also an important scientific source on India's natural geography, ecology, and culture. Thanks to Bobur's sharp observational skills and literary talent, we gain a deeper understanding of the flora, fauna, climate, and environment of 15th–16th century India.

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