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Mughal Army and the Natural World: Three Instances When Mughal Army Ran Up against Force of Nature

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Introduction- Winters in George RR Martin's novels A Song of Fire and Ice and HBO's hit series Game of Thrones can last for years. They bring the kingdom of Westeros long nights, cold, and the never-ending snow. Winters also revive aggressive non-human beings known in the books as the Others and in the TV series as the White Walkers. Wight armies are zombie armies led by these animals. The fear of such a dreadful winter is immortalized in the proclamation "winter is coming," which has become a part of popular culture.

The Mughal Empire did not have any White Walkers or Wights. Winter, on the other hand, could hit the empire's armies with equal terror. Furthermore, while the people of Westeros had the only winter to fear, Mughal armies also had to contend with a second season: monsoon. The empire's military juggernaut was slowed by this fear of environmental powers, and territorial expansion was also jeopardized. Three tales of Mughal troops, officers, and even a prince who declined to serve because of environmental concerns will be presented in this essay.

In imperial ranks, refusals were uncommon. In Mughal politics, the emperor was the source of power, and loyalty and the ability to serve were regarded as the highest virtues.

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Pavittarbir Singh Saggu

Introduction

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In imperial ranks, refusals were uncommon. In Mughal politics, the emperor was the source of power, and loyalty and the ability to serve were regarded as the highest virtues. Opposing the emperor was akin to opposing divine will. The emperor was the final arbiter of all promotions and punishments, except on a more mundane basis. Refusing to comply with his desires may be construed as a grave insult, with stern consequences. That is why these three denials are so notable.

I. In Balkh, Prince Murad Bakhsh

1646 was the year. In what is now Afghanistan, the fifth Mughal emperor Shah Jahan dispatched a massive army led by his son Prince Murad Bakhsh to conquer the Uzbek-ruled city of Balkh. It was expected to be the start of the Mughals reclaiming their ancestral lands in Central Asia, which the Uzbeks had taken from them during Babur's reign. Balkh's Uzbek ruler fled the city as the army advanced. Without much difficulty, Prince Murad took possession of the land.

Soon after, however, he began to feel uncomfortable. He didn't want to remain in Balkh any longer. He requested a switch of the post in a letter to his father. When his son's request arrived, Shah Jahan was busy celebrating the victory in Balkh. He refused the appeal and told Murad to stay at his station, which irritated him. Even though Balkh had been occupied, Mughal control over the region had yet to be established. Murad declined to comply with the order. He set out on a return trip, leaving his subordinate commanders in charge. In retaliation, Shah Jahan had his son's mansab (rank) and jagir (office) revoked (land assignment). However, he was unable to persuade the prince to serve in Balkh.

What is the cause of the prince's strange behavior? The dread of the onset of the harsh and snowy Central Asian winter, according to contemporary reports. The region's roads were frequently narrow, and the landscape was rough. Every year, winter snow will close the roads for several months, causing colossal logistical difficulties for the Mughal armies. During campaigns, when heavy snowfall made roads impassable, they were often stranded for days. Workers would have to shovel snow and level the field ahead of the main army. The area was also very arid, making it impossible for large armies to survive on the soil. As a result, they had to take a large portion of their supplies with them. This, on the other hand, slowed them down and reduced the scope of their operations. Gathering enough grass and fodder for the cavalry's large number of horses proved difficult as well.

The environmental conditions had already exacerbated the Mughal troops under Murad Bakhsh when they arrived in Balkh and occupied the city. They were all very concerned about what lay ahead as the cold winter approached. By October, the roads will be blocked by snow, rendering their return to Hindustan unlikely until spring. Murad Bakhsh's petition to his father was written in this sense. In fact, according to contemporary chroniclers, the prince's aversion to spending the winter in Balkh was shared by the rank and file of his army. The prince must have been taken aback by Shah Jahan's rejection of Murad Bakhsh's offer for a move. More than upcoming military threats, his reluctance to serve in Balkh was ultimately motivated by his fear of experiencing the Central Asian winter.

II. In Kashmir, The Mughal Campaign

This reminds me of what happened in Kashmir a few years ago. In 1586, the empire had just taken control of the Srinagar Valley. However, Muhammad

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Qasim Khan, the victorious army's commander, found himself in a pickle. He had defeated Kashmir's former rulers, the Chak dynasty, by invading the area. The adherents of the previous regime, on the other hand, refused to submit to the conquerors and fought back. The imperial army stationed in Srinagar had little respite as threats to Mughal authority mounted. However, much to Qasim Khan's chagrin, the troops under his command refused to leave the city to fight the insurgents. With no other choice, Qasim Khan had no choice but to face his foes on his own.

Again, historical sources point to environmental concerns as the primary reason for the Mughal troops' reluctance to fight. Mughal armies' first encounter in Kashmir was marked by struggles to cope with bitterly cold winters, harsh terrain, and arid conditions. The heavy cold, the high cost of provisions, the difficult roads, and the rain and snow, according to Akbar's biographer Abul Fazl, harassed imperial troops "excessively." Throughout the year, the mountainous terrain was particularly difficult. In an avalanche and landslide near the Pir Panjal Pass in 1594, for example, about 115 porters were killed. Another concern was a lack of supply. In Kashmir, cultivation was small, making it difficult for large Mughal armies to feed themselves off the soil.

The Kashmiri elite used these natural conditions to resist against the invaders, for example by fighting imperial forces in difficult mountain passes. The Mughal soldiers' lives were made even more difficult as a result of this. The majority of them were used to warmer temperatures and level terrain. "These delicate, warmer countries men did not want to go through the defiles in a cold country," Abul Fazl sarcastically points out. It is in this light that we must understand Qasim Khan's soldiers' reluctance to leave Srinagar and face the Kashmiri resistance.

III. In Assam, The Mughals Advance

Monsoon, as previously said, was another season that could jeopardize Mughal campaigns. This was, in reality, a common occurrence in the empire's eastern reaches and is the subject of our final tale.

In 1662, the Brahmaputra Valley was conquered by an army led by Emperor Aurangzeb's trusted general Mir Jumla. It swept through Assam quickly and easily, encountering little resistance. The Ahoms retreated to the hills and forests after a few initial engagements, leaving Mir Jumla's forces in control of the majority of Assam. The activity ended in a settlement between the Mughals and the Ahoms in early 1663. Aurangzeb issued a Farman (royal decree) near the end of the campaign, appointing two officers from the Assam campaign as subadar (governor) of Assam and faujdar (military commander) of Kamrup, respectively. The farmans were brought by emperor's emissaries who traveled ffrom North India to Assam to the assembly of the Mughal officers. To everyone's surprise, both commanders immediately declined to recognize their new positions. No amount of persuasion could persuade them otherwise.

These commanders' decisions can also be traced back to the army's difficulties in handling Assam's climate. Heavy monsoon rains had triggered widespread flooding shortly after the Mughal army invaded the area. The invading army was completely disorganized as a result of this. "... [A]rmies of clouds, moving like elephants, emerged from the side of every mountain; arrows of raindrops caused the nalas and rivers to swell; and the latter, wearing helmets of waves over their heads, created noise and tumult in all directions," writes one chronicler, Khafi Khan.

It provided an opportunity for the Ahoms. They emerged from their hiding place, mounted their warships, and launched an assault on the invaders. The floods, on the other hand, had stranded Mughal soldiers at various locations. They were easy targets for the Ahoms because they were unable to help each other. The Ahoms took advantage of the situation, leading devastating attacks regularly, particularly at night. The Mughal army was made powerless.

To make matters worse, rain and flooding disrupted Mughal communications with their Bengal base. This caused disruption of the supply chain and a serious food shortage. Various epidemics erupted in the Mughal camp, claiming many lives. Finally, the imperial army only managed to reach an agreement with the Ahom kingdom and flee Assam. The two Mughal commanders refused their new appointments because of the campaign's traumatic experience. Accepting the arrangements would have required them to return to Assam and relive the horrors they had just witnessed.

IV. Natural Occurrences

Aside from climate, landscape, and ecology, there were other influences in all three cases. To name one, there are significant military obstacles. Mounted archers from Uzbekistan targeted Mughal armies on the move in Balkh. Even after the imperial conquest of Srinagar, the deposed aristocracy in Kashmir fought back with tenacity. Finally, in Assam, Mughal forces fought back against the Ahoms' determined nighttime assaults.

Military problems, on the other hand, became more challenging to manage in all three cases as adversaries used environmental conditions to their advantage. They were able to do so because they were more familiar with the local environment. In these situations, supply was also a problem. Mughal armies depended on itinerant grain merchants known as the Banjara for food in most of South Asia. They did not, however, work in any of these three areas. These

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logistical problems were exacerbated by the dryness of the Balkh and Kashmir and the floods and ecology of Assam.

These tales provide insight into the Mughal empire's complicated relationships with the natural world. Many of these encounters took place in the realm of warfare. The ability of the Mughals to wage war was dependent on their ability to harness and use natural resources such as cattle, crops, firewood, and water. Armies attempted to tame the landscape by chopping down trees, leveling the earth, melting snow, and bridging rivers during military campaigns. At the same time, environmental factors such as climate, ecology, and landscape influenced how campaigns were carried out. They made decisions about military tactics, policy, logistics, and technology implementation. And for the Mughals, colonial expansion was also derailed in many ways.

Today, we live in a world where human civilization has been brought to its knees by a killer pandemic. Even ten years ago, global environmental disaster seemed like a far-fetched possibility. It's right in front of us now. It's crucial to research the complexities of human-environment interactions in the past to understand how we got here. This is where environmental history plays a significant role. In the case of South Asia, this area flourished primarily during the colonial era. Pre-colonial human-environment dynamics are much less well understood. We are given an insight into these largely unexplored narratives by concentrating on the relationships of the Mughal Empire with the natural world.

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