Humayun (1530-1556 A.D.)

:The below mentioned article provides a biography of Humayun (1530-1556 A.D.).Nasir-Ud-Din Muhammad Humayun, the eldest son of Babur was born at Kabul on 6 March 1508 A.D. He was the only son of his mother, Mahim Sultana. His younger brother Kamran and Askari were born of another wife of Babur, Gulrukh Begum while Hindal, the youngest one was the son of Dildar Begum.

Humayun was given proper education and had experience of fighting and administration before his accession. He participated in the battles of Panipat and Khanua and looked after the administration of Hisar Firuza, Badakhshan and Sambhal during the life-time of his father. Babur nominated him as his successor before his death.

ADVERTISEMENTS:Nizamuddin, the vazir who had doubts about the capabilities of Humayun, tried to place on the throne Mahdi Khwaja, the brother-in-law of Babur. But realising the futility of his plan afterwards, he abandoned it and supported the cause of Humayun. Therefore, Humayun ascended the throne on 30 December 1530 A.D. without a contest four days after the death of Babur.

Early Difficulties of Humayun:

Humayun had to face many difficulties right from his accession on the throne. His own character, his brothers and relatives and the legacy from Babur created several problems for him. But his greatest enemy were again the Afghans who yet aspired to capture the throne of Delhi from the Mughuls.

1. Legacy from Babur:

Babur could not get time to consolidate his conquests in India. He distributed money and treasures lavishly among his nobles and soldiers which created financial difficulties for the empire. Therefore, Humayun inherited an unstable and bankrupt empire from his father. Besides, the advice of Babur to treat his brothers well also created problems for an obedient son, Humayun.

2. Brothers of Humayun:

All the three brothers of Humayun proved not only incapable but disloyal as well to their elder brother. When the Mughul empire needed the cooperation of the brothers and, thereby, unity in the Mughul camp, the brothers of Humayun divided its resources by emphasising on their selfish ends and ambitions.

While Humayun needed help from his brothers, they either became indifferent towards him or raised the standard of revolt against him. Thus, each of his brothers created problems for Humayun at one time or the other.

3. Humayun’s Relatives:

Babur had assigned large jagirs to his relatives. That made them quite powerful and enhanced their ambitions. One of them Mahdi Khwaja aspired for the throne just after the death of Babur. Another two relations of Humayun, viz., Muhammad Zaman Mirza, his brother-in-law and Muhammad Sultan Mirza, his cousin revolted against him and helped his enemies.

4. Absence of a Unified Army:

The Mughul army was not a national army. It was a heterogeneous body of adventurers—Chaghatais, Uzbegs, Mughuls, Persians, Afghans and Hindustanis. Such an army could be effective only under the leadership of a capable commander like Babur. Under a man of less calibre, it could turn out to be a congregation of adventurers.

5. Character of Humayun:

Humayun was a brave and well-meaning person. But, as a king, he suffered from certain weaknesses. He was neither a capable commander nor a diplomat. He failed to understand the enormity of his problems and the necessity of providing strong leadership to his followers. He also lacked the capability of continuous hard labour.

However, the greatest weakness of Humayun was his extreme generosity which became one of the causes of his failure. Lane-Poole has rightly remarked- “His failure was in no small measure due to his beautiful but unwise clemency.” Thus, the character of Humayun was also one of his difficulties.

6. The Division of the Empire by Humayun:

Humayun gave large territory to each of his brothers which virtually meant the division of the empire. He assigned Kandhar and Kabul to Kamran, Sambhal to Askari and Mewat to Hindal. Afterwards he permitted Kamran to occupy Punjab and Hisar-Firuza as well.

According to Dr A.L. Srivastava it was a great mistake of Humayun because he, thus, divided the resources and the strength of the empire. But Dr R.P. Tripathi says that Humayun had to do it according to the tradition of the Mongols and the Turks otherwise there was danger of civil war among the brothers.

However, whatever may be the reason it was a mistake on the part of Humayun. Particularly, it was unwise on his part to give north-western part of his empire to Kamran because it was the best recruiting ground of the soldiers for the Mughul army.

7. The Afghans:

The worst enemies of Humayun were, however, the Afghans. They were the masters of Delhi only some years back and they did not give up the ambition to capture it again. Mahmud Lodi had returned to Bihar and was getting active support from Nusrat Shah of Bengal to make a fresh attempt to capture Delhi.

Bahadur Shah, the ruler of Gujarat was also an Afghan. He was young and ambitious. He had conquered Malwa and was increasing his pressure on Rajasthan, particularly on Mewar. Many fugitive Afghan nobles had found shelter under him.

Another Afghan chief, Sher Khan, was shrewdly attempting to organise the Afghans against the Mughuls. He was an insignificant rival of Humayun at that time but, later on, he proved himself to be the strongest enemy of Humayun and, finally, succeeded in turning out Humayun from India.

Efforts of Humayun to Remove his Difficulties: Contest with the Afghans:

1. Attack on Kalinjar (1531 A.D.):

Only after some months of his accession on the throne Humayun engaged himself in fighting. It began with his attack on Kalinjar. Its ruler Prataprudra Deo was supposed to be sympathetic towards the Afghans. He was putting pressure on Kalpi. If Kalpi had gone to him and he would have, then, gone to the side of Bahadur Shah of Gujarat, it would have proved dangerous for Humayun.

Therefore, it was primarily to check the growing influence of Bahadur Shah that Humayun decided to capture Kalinjar and therefore, attacked it in 1531 A.D. He besieged the fort but before he could capture it, news reached him that Sher Khan had captured the fort of Chunar and the Afghans under Mahmud Lodi were advancing towards Jaunpur. Humayun agreed for peace with Prataprudra Deo and returned after taking some money from him as compensation. Thus, the attack of Kalinjar proved futile.

2. The Battle of Dauhria (Dadrah) and the First Siege of Chunar (1532 A.D.):

The Afghans, under Mahmud Lodi, had forced the Mughul governor of Jaunpur to retreat and were consolidating their position in Avadh (Oudh) by the time Humayun reached in the east to subdue them. Humayun defeated the Afghans at Dauhria. Mahmud Lodi could flee away from the battle but lost all his prestige among the Afghans and participated no more in politics.

Humayun, then, besieged the fort of Chunar which was in the hands of Sher Khan. Humayun failed to capture the fort even after a siege of four months. By that time, Bahadur Shah of Gujarat increased his pressure on Rajasthan which was against the interest of Humayun.

Humayun, therefore, asked Sher Khan to accept his suzerainty and send a contingent of Afghan troops to serve him. Sher Khan agreed and sent his son Qutb Khah to serve the Mughul emperor. Humayun, then, returned to Agra.

Humayun wasted nearly one and a half year at Agra and spent his money in the construction of a new city in Delhi called Din Panah. In 1534 A.D. Muhammad Zaman Mirza and Muhammad Sultan Mirza revolted in Bihar but they were defeated and imprisoned though they escaped from the prison soon after.

3. Contest with Bahadur Shah (1535-36 A.D.):

Bahadur Shah, the ruler of Gujarat had entered into treaties with some states of south India, conquered Malwa in 1531 A.D., captured the fort of Raisen in 1532 A.D. and forced the ruler of Mewar to accept a treaty. He was in correspondence with Sher Khan and Nusrat Shah of Bengal against Humayun.

He had strengthened his forces and built up a strong artillery by securing the services of a Turkish gunner, Rumi Khan. He provided shelter to Muhammad Zaman Mirza and refused to return him to Humayun. He desired to capture Delhi itself and, thus, was posing a threat to the Mughuls.

Humayun decided to settle his score with Bahadur Shah and entered Malwa with this view. At that time, Bahadur Shah had besieged the fort of Chittor. Karanwati, the Rajamata of Mewar sent a rakhi to Humayun and sought his assistance as a brother. Humayun proceeded towards Chittor but stopped at Sarangpur on the way.

He did not desire to attack Bahadur Shah till he was engaged in jihad against the infidels of Mewar. Dr R.P. Tripathi has given certain other reasons as well which forced Humayun to stop at Sarangpur. He says that Humayun desired to consolidate his army, win over those peoples of Malwa who were against Bahadur Shah and arrange for the stoppage of help coming to Bahadur Shah either from Mandu or Ahmadabad.

He was suspicious of the activities of the friendly states of Bahadur Shah in the South and desired to take all precautions against their activities as well as those of Alam Khan Lodi who had gone towards Kalinjar and could attack Humayun from behind. After ten days, Chittor was captured by Bahadur Shah and freely looted for three days.

Humayun then proceeded forward and reached Mandasor, 60 miles from Chittor and checked the route of return of Bahadur Shah. Bahadur Shah also reached Mandasor and instead of attacking Humayun took defensive postures. Humayun kept his army out of reach of the artillery of Bahadur Shah and stopped his supplies.

Bahadur Shah felt short of supplies and his army lost its morale. He fled away without fighting during the night of 25 April 1535 A.D. and took shelter in the fort of Mandu. Humayun pursued the fugitive. From Mandu, Bahadur Shah fled away to Champaner, then to Combay and afterwards to Diu.

Humayun pursued Bahadur Shah up to Combay but then, leaving the task of pursuing Bahadur Shah to his nobles, returned to besiege the fort of Champaner. It was captured by him and he got a large booty from there which he lavishly distributed among his followers.

By that time, entire Malwa and Gujarat had surrendered to the Mughuls. It was a grand success and so were the capture of the forts of Mandu and Champaner. Humayun appointed his brother Askari as the governor of Gujarat, left Hindu Beg for his assistance and came back to Mandu.

Askari, however, failed to manage the affairs of Gujarat which resulted in a revolt by the people under Imad-ul-mulk, one of the trusted officers of Bahadur Shah. Bahadur Shah himself arrived in Gujarat after some time.

After a minor battle against the forces of Bahadur Shah, Askari decided to retire to the fort of Champaner. Tardi Beg, the governor of the fort, however, refused to hand over the fort and its treasure to Askari as he grew suspicious of the design of Askari. Askari, then, proceeded towards Agra. Bahadur Shah captured Champaner very soon and Tardi Beg retreated to Mandu.

Thus, the whole of Gujarat was lost by Humayun to Bahadur Shah. Fearing that Askari might capture Agra for himself, Humayun also left Mandu and proceeded towards Agra. The two brothers met in the way and Humayun was assured of the loyalty of his brother. He gracefully pardoned him and all other officers and reached Agra. Mandu was occupied by Mallu Khan in the name of Bahadur Shah.

Therefore, Malwa was also lost by the Mughuls. Thus, within a year, both Malwa and Gujarat were lost by the Mughuls. The incompetence of Askari and the neglect of personal attention towards the affairs of Gujarat and Malwa by Humayun were the primary reasons of this loss of the Mughuls.

It was a very poor show on the part of Humayun. Lane-Poole has commented- “Malwa and Gujarat, two provinces equal in area to all the rest of Humayun’s kingdom had fallen like ripe fruits into his hands. Never was conquest so easy. Never too was conquest more recklessly squandered away.”

4. Contest with Sher Khan (1537-1540 A.D.):

While Humayun was busy in fighting against Bahadur Shah, Sher Khan consolidated his position in Bihar. He had become the master of south Bihar, was in possession of the strong fort of Chunar and most of the Afghan nobles had gathered under his banner. In Bengal, Nusrat Shah had died and his successor Mahmud Shah proved an incapable ruler.

That gave further opportunity to Sher Khan to strengthen his power at the cost of Bengal. He attacked Bengal in 1536 A.D., besieged its capital Gaur and forced Mahmud Shah to pay thirteen lakh dinars. In 1537 A.D., he again attacked Bengal. Only then Humayun realised that it was necessary to subdue Sher Khan.

In July 1537 A.D. Humayun proceeded towards Bihar and first laid the siege of Chunargarh. Humayun could capture the fort after six months. In the meantime Sher Khan had captured Gaur and looted all its treasure which he kept safe at the fort of Rohtasgarh. Humayun, thus, lost valuable time in the siege of Chunargarh.

Humayun reached Banaras and started negotiations with Sher Khan for peace. It was agreed that the province of Bengal would be handed over to Sher Khan under the suzerainty of the Mughuls and he would pay ten lakh rupees annually while Bihar would be taken over by the Mughuls. But before the treaty could be signed, a messenger of Mahmud Shah arrived and requested Humayun to attack Bengal to save his master.

Humayun broke off the negotiations with Sher Khan and proceeded towards Bengal. Sher Khan deputed his son Jalal Khan to delay the advance of Humayun. Jalal Khan successfully achieved his mission and returned to his father who had successfully finished his campaign in Bengal and returned to Bihar. Humayun, therefore, faced no difficulty in capturing Bengal.

According to Dr A.L. Srivastava, Humayun wasted eight months in Bengal and failed to maintain his communication with Delhi, Agra or even Banaras while Dr R.P. Tripathi says that he established order in Bengal and consolidated his army. Whatever might be the reason of Humayun for staying in Bengal for eight months but he again lost valuable time.

During these months, Sher Khan captured Kara, Banaras, Sambhal, etc. and laid siege of Chunargarh and Jaunpur. He virtually blocked the way of return of Humayun to Agra. After some months, news of the activities of Sher Khan and also that of his brother Hindal who declared himself emperor at Agra were received by Humayun. He left Jahangir Quli Beg with five hundred soldiers in Bengal and proceeded towards Agra in March 1539 A.D.

The Battle of Chausa (26 June 1539 A.D.):

Humayun took the route of the Grand Trunk Road which passed through south Bihar which was under complete control of Sher Khan. According to Dr A.L Srivastava, it was a great mistake. But according to Dr R.P. Tripathi ‘it was the most proper route because it was known to the Mughuls and led them to Chaunargarh where the Mughuls were still fighting against the Afghan besiegers.’

However, Humayun was forced to cross the river Ganges once more and he reached Chausa, a place at the boundary between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Sher Khan also reached there. The two armies remained there facing each other for three months (April to June 1539 A.D.). Negotiations of peace were carried on but nothing came out of them.

Sher Khan delayed the battle deliberately. He waited for the rains which would create problem for the Mughul army which was camping in the low land between the rivers Ganges and Karmanasa. That actually happened when the rains started. On 25 June he gave the impression to the Mughuls that he was proceeding to subdue one of the tribal chiefs in Bihar. But, he returned and attacked the Mughuls in the early hours of 26th June from three sides.

The Mughuls were completely surprised and the entire army was destroyed. Humayun just saved his life by plunging himself into the river Ganges and crossing it with the help of a water-carrier, Nizam. Sher Khan declared himself the Sultan and assumed the title of Sher Shah after this battle. He captured Bengal as well and then returned to Kannauj.

The Battle of Bilgram or Kannauj (17 May 1540 A.D.):

While Sher Shah was consolidating his position in the east, Humayun and his brothers wasted their time at Agra. Humayun had generously pardoned not only his brother Hindal but also the rebel. Sultan Mirza. Yet the brothers could not unite among themselves. Kamran fell ill and he grew suspicious that Humayun was poisoning him slowly.

Therefore, he left for Lahore with the larger part of his army. The Mughuls, of course, defeated the Afghan army in Malwa which was sent by Sher Shah under his son Qutb Khan. But, they failed to take any effective measure against Sher Shah. However, Humayun finally moved towards the east and reached near Kannauj where Sher Shah had already encamped himself.

This time too the two armies faced each other for more than a month and again the rains started. On 17 May 1540 A.D when the Mughuls were shifting themselves to a higher plain, Sher Shah attacked them. The Mughuls fought valiantly but were defeated. Humayun again fled away.

The battle of Bilgram was the decisive battle between Humayun and Sher Shah. Humayun could reach Agra but had to fly from there as Sher Shah was pursuing him. Sher Shah captured Delhi and Agra and, thus, the Afghans snatched the throne of Delhi from the hands of the Mughuls. Humayun first went to Lahore, then to Sindh and, finally, left India to seek refuge at the court of Shah of Persia.

5. The Causes of the Failure of Humayun against Sher Shah:

There were various causes which resulted in the failure of Humayun against Sher Shah. Among modern historians, Dr R.P. Tripathi is one who has taken a most sympathetic view towards Humayun. He has expressed that the opposition of his brothers and weakness of his character as causes of his failure have been highly exaggerated by many historians which is an act of injustice to him.

Humayun divided his empire among his brothers because it was a tradition among the Timurids. If he had not done so, there was every possibility of a civil war among the brothers. The time, which he passed in Mandu after the conquests of Gujarat and in Gaur after the conquest of Bengal, was not passed in ease and comfort but in organising the administration of these newly conquered states.

Among his brothers Kamran did nothing against him for the first ten years of his rule. However, he lost faith in the capacity of Humayun to defend the empire and so left him to safeguard his own provinces. Askari never revolted against Humayun. On the contrary, he was always by the side of Humayun in all his important battles. He left Humayun to go with Kamran because he was his real brother.

Besides, he gave a chance to Humayun in escaping to Persia and looked after his son Akbar in his absence. Hindal possessed a weak personality. He revolted against Humayun mostly under the influence of others. Yet, he loved Humayun and, ultimately, died fighting for his sake.

Of course, if Kamran and Hindal would have gone to the support of Humayun before the battle of Chausa, probably, Humayun would have succeeded against Sher Shah. But the cause of their neglect at that time was more due to their miscalculations rather than bad intentions.

The same way, there was nothing very much wrong in the character of Humayun. He was addicted to opium but it was nothing as compared to the addiction of Babur to opium, liquor, etc. Humayun was a brave soldier and an experienced general. Therefore, his character and the opposition of his brothers should not be accepted as major causes of his failure.

The major cause of the failure of Humayun was that his enemies possessed an equally effective artillery. Another important cause was that Sher Shah was, certainly, a better and more experienced military commander than Humayun-. Yet, another disadvantage of Humayun was his financial difficulty which he inherited from his father and which worsened further due to his generosity.

Besides, Humayun was an unlucky man. He lost Gujarat and Malwa because Tardi Beg refused to support Askari; Mahmud Shah of Bengal failed to defend himself against Sher Shah even for a few months; and, heavy rains disturbed the Mughul army before the battle of Kannauj. Humayun was also a poor judge of men and circumstances. He was no match to Babur or Sher Shah as a diplomat.

Dr Tripathi, therefore, concludes:

“Humayun was neither favoured by luck, nor so gifted by nature as to be able to sustain the weight of the great problems which he was called upon to tackle. His chief opponent Sher Shah had the advantage of both.”

According to Dr S.R. Sharma, handing over the north-western provinces in the hands of Kamran, neglect of finances of the state, avoidance of support to Chittor, thereby, losing the golden opportunity of getting sympathy of the Rajputs, neglect of the affairs of Gujarat and Malwa after their conquests, failure to suppress Sher Shah before he could become formidable, his extremely generous nature, wrong assessment of military situations and incapacity to take immediate decisions, etc. constituted causes of his failure against Sher Shah.

The same way, Dr A.L. Srivastava has assigned different causes for his failure. He says that Humayun committed many mistakes from the very beginning. He divided his empire among his brothers, engaged himself in wars without managing the finances of the state, failed to subdue Sher Shah in time, left Chunargarh un-captured in 1532 A.D., failed to attack Bahadur Shah when he was besieging the fort of Chittor, failed to consolidate his conquests of Malwa and Gujarat, wasted nearly six months in capturing Chunargarh when he attacked it the second time, proceeded to Bengal without first conquering Bihar, gave sufficient time to Sher Shah to consolidate his position in the east after the battle of Chausa and encamped on the low land before the battle of Kannauj. All these were his mistakes.

Besides he lacked qualities of leadership, engaged himself in pleasures when he was supposed to be active in looking after the affairs of the state and wasted his money and time at critical moments of his life. All this led to his failure against Sher Shah.

Thus, there were various causes which were responsible for the failure of the Mughuls under Humayun against the Afghans under the leadership of Sher Shah. On the one hand were the personal weaknesses and mistakes of Humayun and, on the other hand, was the quality of leadership and organising capacity of his rival Sher Shah. Both sealed the fate of Humayun for many years to come.

Humayun, in fact, was never on sound ground and he failed to get a firm control over his empire during his lifetime. Therefore, Lane-Poole has remarked- “Humayun tumbled through life and he tumbled out of it.”

Humayun in Exile (1540-1555 A.D.):

Humayun remained in exile for nearly fifteen years after his defeat at the battle of Kannauj. His efforts to go to Kashmir or Badakhshan were foiled by his brother Kamran. He then proceeded to Sindh and tried to capture it but failed. In 1541 A.D. he married Hamida Banu, the daughter of the spiritual preceptor of Hindal, Mir Ali Akbar Jani.

Hindal left for Kandhar at that time and another loyal officer of Humayun, Yadgar Mirza also left his company. Humayun, proceeded towards Marwar. Its ruler Maldeva had assured of his help to Humayun about a year back. But, Humayun realised that he was not in a mood to help him at that time and, probably, was won over by Sher Shah to his side.

He immediately withdrew himself because he feared that Maldeva would imprison him and hand him over to Sher Shah. While returning from there he was given shelter by Virasala, the Rajput ruler of Amarkot where Akbar was born in 1542 A.D. Shah Husain, the ruler of south Sindh agreed to give passage and needful help to Humayun to proceed to Kandhar at that time and Humayun left India.

Kamran tried to capture him on the way but Humayun could reach Persia safely after leaving his infant son Akbar. Akbar was taken under the care of Askari who was the governor of Kandhar at that time. Shah Tahmasp, the ruler of Persia, welcomed Humayun and agreed to help him with money and soldiers in 1544 A.D. on condition that he would accept the Shia faith, propagate it among his subjects and restore Kandhar to Persia after its conquest.

Humayun had to accept that humiliating treaty and then he proceeded to attack Kandhar with the help of the Persian forces. Humayun captured Kandhar and Kabul from Kamran in 1545 A.D. and retained Kandhar to himself after the death of the son of Shah Tahmasp. Here he was joined back by Hindal and Yadgar Mirza. But, Kamran and Askari troubled him.

They were, however, defeated several times, pardoned by Humayun every time but, ultimately, were captured and punished. Kamran was blinded and allowed to proceed to Mecca where he died in 1557 A.D. Askari was also allowed to go to Mecca from where he never returned and died in 1558 A.D.

Hindal also fell fighting against the Afghans during this period. Thus, ultimately, Humayun became free from the rivalry of his brothers and settled himself in Afghanistan from where he got an opportunity to come back to India and recover his lost empire.

Recovery of Indian Empire and Death of Humayun (1555-1556 A.D.):

Sher Shah who had turned out Humayun from India died in 1545 A.D. He was succeeded by Islam Shah. Humayun once attempted to attack India during his life-time but could not carry out his plan due to vigorous activity of Islam Shah. Islam Shah died in October 1553 A.D. That resulted in the division of the Afghan empire in India.

His twelve-year old son, Firoz Shah was murdered by his maternal uncle, Mubariz who captured the throne and assumed the title of Muhammad Adil Shah. Adil Shah was a pleasure-seeker and left the responsibility of administration in the hands of his Hindu minister, Hemu. The authority of Adil Shah was soon challenged by two members of the royal family, named Ibrahim Shah and Sikandar Shah and Bengal declared its independence under Muhammad Shah.

Adil Shah, Ibrahim Shah and Sikandar Shah hotly contested among themselves for the capture of the empire. Nobody succeeded in eliminating others which resulted in the division of the empire. Sikandar Shah established himself at Lahore and Ibrahim Shah at Bayana while Adil Shah retired to Chunargarh leaving Hemu to contest against his rivals.

Delhi was taken over first by Ibrahim Shah and then by Sikandar Shah. This was the state of affairs of the empire which was built up by Sher Shah when Humayun decided to recapture his lost empire. In November 1554 A.D., Humayun proceeded towards Peshawar and captured the territory up to Lahore by the beginning of 1555 A.D. Sikandar Shah sent an army under Tatar Khan and Haibat Khan to check the advance of Humayun.

The battle of Machhiwara took place on 15 May 1555 A.D. between the Afghans and the Mughuls. It was a complete victory for the Mughuls and entire Panjab was occupied by them. Sikandar Shah himself then marched forward to fight against the Mughuls and the battle of Sarhind was fought between the two on 22 June 1555 A.D.

Sikandar Shah was defeated and fled to the hills of north-west Punjab. Humayun, then occupied Delhi in July 1555 A.D. Afterwards, Agra, Sambhal and the nearby territory was also occupied by the Mughuls.

Humayun, however, could not live long after the capture of Delhi. One day when he was descending from the stairs of the library at Din Panah, he slipped and fractured his skull. Only two days after the accident, he died on 26 January 1556 A.D. He nominated his son Akbar as his successor to the throne before his death.