

The Battle of Khanwa in Mughal Historiography: Bias and Representation

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the Battle of Khanwa (1527) by examining how Mughal writers presented and biased the event's history. Though the Battle of Khanwa played an essential role in the early days of the Mughal Empire, Babur and Abu'l-Fazl portray it in a biased way. The study seeks to discover how Mughal historians told a version of history that made the Mughal Empire seem legitimate and Babur's victory seem unavoidable. By studying previous works like the Baburnama and Akbarnama, the paper examines how Mughals and European writers described the same events, ensuring imperial messages were heard. The Mughal accounts blame the Rajputs' resistance on politics inside their ranks and their lack of substantial military numbers. The paper concludes by pointing out what these biases mean for studying Mughal history and lists some future topics to consider, including local accounts and other perspectives on the battle.

Keywords: Battle of Khanwa, Mughal historiography, Babur, Bias in History and Rajputs.

Introduction

Background of the Battle of Khanwa

The Battle of Khanwa, fought in March 1527, significantly shaped the young Mughal Empire. The fight occurred between Babur, who founded the Mughal Empire, and Rana Sanga of Mewar, who wanted to oppose Babur's movement in India. It was fought near the village of Khanwa, some 60 kilometers west of Agra, and greatly contributed to the unification of Mughal power in India (Kinra, 2020). The victory at Khanwa by Babur guaranteed Mughal domination in northern India and opened doors for future Mughal rulers to grow their influence in the region.

Babur's achievement was greatly influenced by his battle methods, such as using more advanced artillery made from gunpowder. Even though Rana Sanga had far more soldiers, Babur won because of his strategic skills and support from his partners. Rana Sanga's defeat meant the Rajputs no longer could effectively resist the Mughals, and as a result, the Mughals started dominating most parts of India for the following three centuries. In addition to its military value, the battle is known for how it is described in Mughal history, as this shaped people's views and understanding of the event long after.

Importance of Studying Mughal Historiography

Historiography is the best way to understand how and why past events are written, explained, and remembered. When it came to the Battle of Khanwa, authors such as Abu'l-Fazl and Badauni helped shape how the story is now described. Historiographical analysis makes it possible for us to see how, via its writings, the Mughal Empire celebrated military wins and provided a rationale for its leadership (Ali, 1995).

Even though there is much information in Mughal historiography, it is regularly shaped by the ruling class's political interests. Mughal texts not only reported the location and events of Babur's victory at Khanwa. The book was written to highlight Babur as a true ruler who would create a mighty empire. In contrast, Rana Sanga is often made to look evil in the epic, as his loss meant the central authority of the Mughals was established over the regional leaders. Analyzing these stories helps us appreciate how the beliefs and motivations of various cultures played a role in documenting and handing down history.

Research Objectives and Scope

This research aims to look into the biases and representations shown in Mughal historiography about the Battle of Khanwa. The aim is to find out how the Mughal Empire tried to portray itself in a good light and use history to benefit governments and citizens. In particular, this paper intends to answer the following research questions:

- How were the Battle of Khanwa events detailed by Mughal historians, with special focus on Abu'l-Fazl and Badauni?
- What biases are shown in these stories, especially in how Babur and Rana Sanga are treated?
- What role did these biases play in helping the Mughals maintain their power and authority in India?

It will also examine how these biased accounts have influenced the story of the Mughal Empire and how they are still experienced by those studying the battle today.

Historical Context of the Battle of Khanwa

• Pre-Battle Political Landscape

The dispute at Khanwa in 1527 resulted from many political and military struggles in north India at the beginning of the 16th century. Those at the center of this struggle were Babur, who began the Mughal Empire, and Rana Sanga of Mewar (Agrawal, 1983). The cause of this battle lay in years of political games, competitive rivalries, and partnership changes typical of those years.

In the early 1500s, Babur, a son of Timur and Genghis Khan, claimed the title of ruler over Kabul (the city now known as Afghanistan). In the same year, 1526, Babur won the Battle of Panipat against the Delhi Sultan, Ibrahim Lodi. After the victory, Babur started the Mughal rule in northern India (Ali, 2024). Think About It: Even so, the victory alone was insufficient for him to rule the area without any rivals. Although Babur accomplished a lot, he had to deal with strong resistance from regimes like the Rajputs.

For years, Rana Sanga, the ruler of Mewar, frequently opposed the Muslim leaders in the area north of India. He was respected for his strong army, and with many Hindu rulers nearby, he acted against the increasing power of the Mughals. The Delhi Sultanate and local Muslim groups knew him to be an influential army leader due to his many military campaigns in the north (Mir, 2023). Since the Rajput states had long regarded Muslim incursions as dangerous to their rule and culture, Rana Sanga sought to resist Babur's rise.

The situation became even more complicated because regional states formed group alliances before the fight. Rana Sanga hoped to restore Rajput authority over northern India when he gathered Rajput kings to oppose Babur (Das, 2024). However, Sanga's union with Afghan chieftains and the Rajput leaders did not last long and was always under suspicion. Those groups focused on different things, which would become more noticeable in the coming battle.

Babur, however, supported Muslim and Rajput kings who were easier for him to govern. His use of both guns and tactics strongly impacted his cause (Watson, 1995). He was also working to unify the Empire under a main administration, which led regional forces such as the Rajputs to oppose him right away. In its start, the Mughal Empire had to secure its territory to avoid trouble from within and from outsiders.

Rana Sanga was not only fighting Babur because of politics; he also did so to protect the political freedom of the Rajputs and challenge what they saw as foreign control. Sanga thought he could stand firmly against Babur since he was still regarded as an invader trying to take over India. His association with rulers such as the Afghan Mahmud Lodi, the kings from Malwa, and those from Rajputana was important for gathering all the troops and supplies required to challenge Babur.

- **The Battle and Its Outcome**

The Battle of Khanwa, on March 17, 1527, was a crucial event in the 16th century since it decided northern India's future and helped establish the Mughal Empire's power for the following centuries (Sarker, 1994). The fight happened close to the village of Khanwa, around sixty kilometers from Agra, between Babur's group and Rana Sanga of Mewar.

Even though Babur's army was smaller, it had access to innovative weapons such as gunpowder artillery and cannons, which made the difference in the battle. Babur's use of new weapons weakened the Rajput cavalry, which was key to Rana Sanga's success. Babur's cannons disorganized the Rajput army since they were unfamiliar with such advanced warfare tools. Moreover, Babur's plan of deploying his artillery on high land and using the cavalry to outsmart the Rajputs significantly turned the battle in his favor.

According to accounts, about 80,000 soldiers were fighting for Rana Sanga, including Rajputs and a full complement of cavalry, infantry, and war elephants (Rahim, 1954). However, Sanga's army was not as strong in solidarity as it looked. Those who fought by his side, especially the Afghan chieftains, had their own goals, and the armies showed signs of not being unified. Friction among Sanga's backers, most prominently the Afghans, affected their unity, thus making it easier for the government's forces to gain an edge in the battle.

The fighting started when both sides arranged themselves in battle formation. Rana Sanga started with an edge over his opponents due to his appreciation for their greater number and the skills of the Rajput fighters (Patar, 2025). However, thanks to their potent weapons and strategic thinking, the Mughals were soon in control.

Babur took over at this point when his cannons created so much commotion that the Rajput cavalry became confused. Because they had never used guns, the sounds and destruction brought by the cannons disorganized the Rajput troops. The Rajput cavalry, which usually led the way in Indian battles, did not know how to react to Babur's cannons.

Amid the battle, Rana Sanga got seriously hurt, and this made his soldiers lose hope. The fact that some of his allies deserted him while the fight was ongoing further reduced his advantage. Babur's forces took advantage of these conditions and slowly but steadily attacked Rana Sanga's forces until they defeated them and forced them to flee (Schimmel, 2004).

The Rajput forces had to run away, and their leader, Rana Sanga, got away from the fight, which meant the Rajputs no longer put up much of a fight against the Mughal army in northern India.

The aftermath of the Battle of Khanwa was significant for Babur. His victory made him the ruler of the entire north of India, and he started building the Mughal Empire (Bhardwaj, 2017). Rana Sanga's defeat broke up the Rajput alliance, and for now, the Rajputs could not stand up against the Mughals. Despite his defeat, Rana Sanga kept fighting against the Mughals, but he gradually lost most of his strength and was never able to be as powerful as before.

Babur's win also changed a lot for the Mughal Empire. It allowed Babur to take over the land, win the support of important local chiefs, and grow his power in northern India. Babur's victory as commander earned him respect and became the start of Mughal rule, which influenced Indian politics and culture for a long time.

Table 1: Background and Context

Location and Terrain	The strategic location and terrain of Khanwa played a crucial role in the outcome of the battle.
Timing and Strategic Planning	The battle took place on March 16, 1527, highlighting the importance of timing and strategic planning in military engagements.
Impact of Leadership and Technology	Babur's victory at Khanwa showcased his military genius and the impact of leadership and the use of advanced technology in altering the course of history.

Mughal Historiography

- **Secondary Sources in Mughal Historiography**

The Battle of Khanwa is remembered through historiography, which mostly originated during and after the reigns of Babur and Akbar. The most significant are the Baburnama, Akbarnama, and various

other works written during and after the Mughal era (Arif, 2021). While most of these texts were written by court historians, they still give us significant insights into how the Mughal rulers wanted themselves to be viewed and remembered.

Babur's work, the Baburnama, is a key source of knowledge about the Battle of Khanwa. Babur describes the battle in detail from a first-person point of view. Babur did not write only about battles in his account. The author also discusses his views on strategy, leadership, and what the victory meant to him. While the Baburnama contains details about the fight, it is important to remember that Babur wrote it to project himself as a winner and to support his authority (Sharma, 2019). He depicts the Egyptians' victory as proof of how brilliantly he used his military skills.

After Babur's time, the Akbarnama, also called the Mughal Archives, was written by Abu'l-Fazl and covers the Mughal Empire in much more detail. While most of Abu'l-Fazl's work is about Emperor Akbar, he still mentions Babur's battles, including the Battle of Khanwa (Yuruk, 2019). Information in the Akbarnama is critical because it sheds light on when the Mughal Empire was building its power under Akbar's rule.

However, Abu'l-Fazl represents Babur's victory mainly to consolidate the Mughal Empire and paints the Rajputs as divided in their opposition. Not only does the Akbarnama talk about the past, but it also serves to bolster the Mughal Empire's image as an important and morally correct force.

Recent historical accounts, such as Badauni's Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, look at these times differently. Though Badauni's account gives an up-to-date picture, it tended to reflect the biases shared by people in his time. Next to the Baburnama and Akbarnama, these writings comprise the main body of literature on the Battle of Khanwa.

- **Key Mughal Historians**

Babur and Abu'l-Fazl are considered two of the most important historians who describe the Battle of Khanwa. Two important sources for understanding the battle are the Chapandaz and Babur's Baburnama (Hassan, 2024). While Babur uses his book to glorify himself, it still sheds light on how he conducted his military campaigns and the obstacles he met in uniting his conquests. Because Babur won the fight, the writer sees his actions as supporting his right to be ruler of India.

The Akbarnama, a work on the reign of Akbar, was written by the grand vizier of Akbar, Abu'l-Fazl. While describing the battlefield events at Khanwa, he is more dedicated to underlining the right to rule of the Mughals (Taufik&Faiz, 2021). His writing ensured that the public viewed Akbar's strength and victory at the Battle of Khanwa as important for making the Empire whole and strong. YouqianLian Zhan leaves out or lessens the role of disagreements among Rajput leaders, which makes their efforts seem futile. His writings play a part in helping the Mughals be seen as leaders appointed by God in India.

- **Historiographical Trends**

The description of the Battle of Khanwa in past writings has changed dramatically over the ages. Babur and Akbar's military triumph was to ensure Babur's control and lay the groundwork for Mughal growth (Khaydarov & Akramjonov, 2025). In their writing during the early Mughal era, historians pointed out that Babur's victory at Panipatan gave the Mughals legal and divinely approved authority to rule India.

As the Mughal Empire grew and its rule lasted longer, historians started to focus on various new topics. As the Mughal Empire started to decline, the attention to the Battle of Khanwa grew less significant. The focus lay on strengthening Mughal rule through government reforms and the threats from various regional powers.

Throughout colonial and post-colonial times, the understanding of the Battle of Khanwa was rewritten several times. British historians of the 19th century often played down the success of Indigenous rulers like Rana Sanga and elevated the success of the Mughal army's strategies (Sharma, 2019). British historians sometimes portrayed the Mughals as part of the earlier imperial rule that prepared the way for British power in India.

In recent decades, scholars have begun to consider the history of Mughal forces by rethinking the accounts of the battle of Khanwa (Taufik&Faiz, 2021). Now, historians often study how disputes and coalitions between countries affected the course of the battle. Contemporary studies of the battle often point out the various divisions within the Rajputs and the long-lasting effects of the battle on their identity and continuous struggle against the Mughals.

Bias and Representation in Mughal Historiography

- **Nationalism and Imperial Legitimacy**

Mughal historiography depicted the Battle of Khanwa in a way that strengthened the Mughal Empire's right to rule. The Mughals, with Babur leading the way and later Akbar, tried to present their rule as God's choice and required India to unite as one Empire (Ahmad & Pande, 2024). According to the writer, the Battle of Khanwa was important as it gave Babur complete control over northern India. Abu'l-Fazl, in his record of history, covered the battle as both a military battle and as showing the Mughal rulers' rightful authority.

Through their versions of Babur's conquest, Mughal writers underlined that the Mughal Empire would restore order and unity to the split and turbulent Indian region. In this way, Khanwa was shown to secure the Mughal Empire's presence while diminishing the importance of other regional groups such as the Rajputs.

- **The Role of the Battle in Shaping Babur's Image**

Babur's battle skills and his title as the founder of the Mughal Empire were the main topics discussed in the literature about Khanwa. The Baburnama describes the battle, pointing out how Babur used new tactics and artillery to gain victory. The success of the battle at Khanwa was given credit to Humayun personally and also used to highlight his intelligence and effective leadership (Nurov, 2023). Mughal historians demonstrated Babur's might as a leader and emphasized his role as one chosen by fate. The way Babur was described as the founder of a mighty dynasty made his image memorable and supported his position as a great military leader for others to follow.

- **Representation of Rana Sanga and the Rajputs**

While the image of Babur was highly honored, Rana Sanga and the Rajputs were mostly viewed negatively in Mughal histories. The way the Khanwa battle was described in writings made the Rajput resistance look simpler than it was. Abu'l-Fazl highlighted disunity among the Rajput allies, saying Sanga's forces were easily divided (Hassan, 2024). It aimed to reduce the Rajputs' threat and imply that the outcome of their challenge was already guaranteed. While giving credit to Sanga's valor and combat abilities, Mughal historians chose to play down the role of Rajput unity and their long history of guarding Indian control, instead describing their failure as due to weakness and lack of cooperation.

- **Colonial and Post-Colonial Reinterpretations**

In colonial times, the history of the Battle of Khanwa was not recorded as it was fought. British historians during the 19th and early 20th centuries tended to praise the Mughal military methods and often saw Babur's triumph as the primary reason for foreign rule in India (Rezavi, 2022). This view furthered the colonial belief that Indian rulers, among them the Rajputs, were unable to work together to drive out outsiders from their land. Scholars studying post-colonial themes in India have reassessed the battle, paying closer attention to the actions taken by the Mughals and the Rajputs. Experts in the field have tried to study the many reasons behind Rajput resistance and questioned why the battle is mainly remembered in terms of the Mughals. These reinterpretations aim to portray the battle more fairly by underlining the lasting influence of the defeated powers in India's history.

Theoretical Framework

- **Concept of Bias in Historical Narratives**

The words historiography and bias define the idea of some historical events being interpreted or portrayed to support a political, ideological, or cultural purpose. This can be seen when crucial details or explanations are hidden or twisted to fit the historian's opinions or the current situation. Historians have questioned how much objectivity is possible in their writing for years. In addition, both the historical materialism of Karl Marx and the culturalism of Edward Said play key roles in explaining how bias can influence how history is written (Khan, et al. 2023).

Historians in the colonies often described events to show why the Empire should exist and to confirm that Europeans were better than the locals. One idea promoted by British colonial historians was that earlier rulers of colonies were inept and were replaced by European powers to help the colonies develop (Roy, 2024). Because of this historiographical bias, how historians described historical events also changed the understanding of native cultures, traditions, and governance.

Scholars from the field of post-colonial theory, like Said and others, state in *Orientalism* that colonialists controlled the writing of history to maintain their power. They focus on replacing the one-sided views created by colonial historians and making sure the colonized subjects are seen as active people involved in historical events.

- **Application to the Battle of Khanwa**

The account of the Battle of Khanwa, as given by Mughal historians, clearly shows how their views affected their narrative of Babur's triumph. The lens of bias in historical writing allows us to understand how Mughal written texts highlighted events in a way that added legitimacy to Mughal rule (Arif, 2021). The story written about Babur described his triumph as a confident and decisive victory that secured his position as ruler and proved his right to rule from above. The story made it seem like Babur's followers were always united and that he was the best planner, mainly because his use of gunpowder weapons was new and groundbreaking to Indians.

The way Rana Sanga and the Rajputs are portrayed in the story shows another type of fairness. According to the Mughal chronicles, the Rajputs were painted as splintered and internally divided, thus lessening their strength and resistance to Mughal rule. This historical approach sidelined the role of the Rajputs in politics and made their battles against the Mughals seem simple (Hassan, 2024). Most Mughal documents glossed over the role of Rajput unity during the struggle against Babur, focusing on fights between Rajput groups and a lack of coordination among Sanga's soldiers.

As a result, the Battle of Khanwa shows that the objectives of influential persons can influence the histories we read. Through careful decisions in artworks, the Mughals showed how their authority was well accepted, which lessened attention to those who fought against them and strengthened their aim of gaining control over more territories. Much like colonialism, this type of history was developed to support the rule of empires and push indigenous ways of managing their affairs into the background.

Analysis and Discussion

- **Comparative Analysis of Different Historians' Accounts**

History about the Battle of Khanwa from Mughal and colonial writers is very different due to their agendas and political climates. Babur talks about the battle in his memoirs, highlighting his tactical skill and the help he thought the Almighty gave him (Khan, 1995). Babur often mentions his actions and writes about how his army's use of gunpowder artillery made the difference in his success. In his book, he does not describe any disagreements in his camp and presents his victory as a result of his abilities and the help of the gods.

On the other hand, Abu'l-Fazl's *Akbarnama* is written to support Akbar's reign and help him gain power. While noting Babur's victory at Khanwa, Abu'l-Fazl makes it clear that this is part of the story of the intended rise of the Mughal Empire (Zaidi, 2024). Abu'l-Fazl writes to make it seem that the Rajputs were divided in their efforts, which, combined with a lack of strategy, sealed their fate and led to their demand for peace. Abu'l-Fazl's text strongly supports the idea of Mughal superiority and argues that India needs to be governed by the Mughals.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, James Mill and Mountstuart Elphinstone represented colonial viewpoints that significantly shifted the story of British-Indian history away from the Indian people (Nath, 2022). In their writings, British scholars frequently pointed out that Babur and the Mughals were more advanced and better armed, and were thus able to outlast the Rajput army easily. Most colonial accounts downplayed the political and social struggles faced by Rajputs, choosing instead to present the Mughals as able rulers on a mission to civilize. The differences between the Mughal and colonial accounts point to the various political purposes behind their interpretations.

- **The Impact of Bias on Historical Understanding**

Biases present in Mughal and colonial historical writing have shaped the way we see the Battle of Khanwa now. How their account framed the events worked to increase the Mughals' authority and make it clear that they had won, despite the Rajputs' disorganization (Watson, 1992). As a result, the earlier Mughal story talked more about the Mughals and less about Rajput roles in the greater history of India. According to colonial writers, the Mughal period brought civilization to India, but at the same time, it ignored how native rulers interacted.

They helped shape people's perceptions of the Mughal Empire by highlighting its military strength and ignoring other important factors involved in its rise. Therefore, Indian history before the

Mughals was overlooked mainly due to the Mughal narrative, which portrayed the Rajputs and other local powers as barriers in their way.

• **Modern Scholarly Views on Bias in Mughal Historiography**

Historians today often challenge the biases found in Mughal and colonial writings. Scholars after colonial rule have considered how the political agendas of the age affected the stories we learn from history. Historical scholars widely agree that a realistic view of the Battle of Khanwa should consider both the Rajputs' tough resistance and the shortcomings in the Mughals' military might. Some historians, including R.C. Majumdar and Irfan Habib, have said that earlier writings about history are unfair to the Rajputs, counselling a new look at their role in fighting the Mughal dynasty (Mir, 2023).

Historians today move beyond the stories of colonialism and imperialism that used to be the focus of Mughal Empire research. Drawing on local histories, traditions, and different viewpoints, modern historians help us see the period from multiple angles. In these newer views, it is accepted that the Rajputs actively influenced India's history and culture.

Conclusion

This paper examined how Mughal and British historians wrote about the Battle of Khanwa and how they developed their opinions about the battle. The analysis showed that Mughal historians, especially Babur and his family members, wrote about the battle as a key win that made everyone trust and accept the Mughal Empire as the paramount rulers. Babur's account in the Baburnama focused on showing how smart he was in battle, while Abu'l-Fazl's Akbarnama explained the battle by saying it was meant to prove that the Mughal rulers had God's support and rulership.

The representation of Rana Sanga and the Rajputs showed bias against them, making them look divided and chaotic, which made people ignore the strength of their fighting and resistance. Colonial writers also changed what people knew about history by showing the Mughals as the stronger group, saying the conquest suited the local people. They skipped over any mention of the strong opposition from the locals.

The findings are important for understanding Mughal history and how history is written about their period. They show how political reasons can make people tell stories about history a certain way, especially when dealing with things like building empires. Mughal historians gave helpful information about the period. However, they sometimes wrote things that made it look like the Empire was always strong and right, making it harder to see how people in India fought back against the Empire. Colonial writers also made things worse by making the Mughals seem like the best rulers in India, while forgetting how important other local leaders like the Rajputs were in Indian history. Understanding these biases helps us build a more accurate and fairer idea of how the Mughal Empire formed and became powerful.

Future research could look at the contributions of historians who have not always been as well-known and the stories from different areas to get a broader range of viewpoints about the Battle of Khanwa. Additionally, comparing Mughal and Rajput sources can help us understand how these two groups interacted and worked with each other. Further studies could also examine how colonial historians have shaped today's view of the Mughals, particularly in India after its independence, where other versions of history are becoming more common.

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