

Ques. Akbar was as good a military general as he was an enlightened Padshah. Comment.

Answer: When we think of Akbar, his religious liberalism and administrative acumen come to mind. What is disregarded is the fact that he was firstly an empire builder. His amazing fighting skills, keen interest in the military technologies & techniques, understanding of psychology of warfare and the habit of leading from the front made him an exceptional general.

When Europe was wracked with intense religious fighting, Akbar was fashioning a new model of composite culture based on his philosophy of '*sulh-i-kul*' which is so eloquently explained by Abul Fazl in his biography '*Ain-i-Akbari*'. An institution builder himself; he instituted a Mansabdari system that combined civil, military and nobility roles into one, and his scheme of checks and balances in the administration imparted stability to the Mughal state. But, these measures are remembered only because they were implemented over an empire that Akbar had himself built from scratch.

From the time of the conquest of Malwa, Akbar expanded the size of his dominion at a blistering pace which extended from Kabul-Kandahar-Ghazni frontier in the west to Bengal in East and from Kashmir in north to Khandesh in south.

The empire was built through the military genius of Akbar who disregarded the old rules of warfare and used speed, fury and firepower in such a

lethal combination that his enemies were often both physically and psychologically overwhelmed. In battles after battles in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Malwa, he crossed deserts, forded rivers and led men across the country with such speed and in such harsh conditions that tested the limits of his own soldiers. Often Akbar being at the vanguard of these forced marches, common soldiery was only emboldened at the sight of such physical endurance of their Padshah. At each stage Akbar tested the loyalty and courage of his men, which for Akbar, was the very same thing.

Akbar also used the relatively new gunpowder technology in innovative ways. He improved upon basic musket and cannon so that artillery became portable and effective even in the harshest environment. He devised ingenious rockets, and created swivel guns which could be fitted onto camels and elephants. He improved siege craft including the super heavy cannons that could be effective against the most redoubtable fortresses.

It was age old wisdom in India for the kings to wait for the end of the monsoon, to launch campaigns in the cool short winter and to move troops in preordained formations. But, Akbar disregarded this wisdom. His armies would march across deserts during night time and abandon war elephants -the tanks of medieval warfare- if they no longer suited their purpose.

He used to organise intimidating ring hunts called 'qumarghas' which were so effective in demonstrating the skills and ferocity of Mughal soldiers that opponents quickly became more circumspect. It was a drill exercise in near battle conditions. During any campaign, once some spectacular victories had

been won, Akbar was quick to use politics and diplomacy to seal a lasting solution in order to preclude further bloodshed.

Thus, Akbar was firstly a military man of exceptional talent. This was the bedrock of his supreme confidence in him, which in turn allowed him to adopt bold socio-religious policies, knowing that he could deal with any adverse military situation created by disaffected elements of his empire.

