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Sher Shah and the Cannon: Rethinking Military Power in 16th-Century Bengal

[1]Sabikun Naher, [2]Jesmin Nahar Jhumur

Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh & Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur, Bangladesh

Abstract

Sher Shah (1540-1545 AD) is one of the prominent figures in the political history of medieval Bengal. He is commonly known for his visionary leadership and strong administration, but his military ingenuity, especially the strategic use of cannon, received less attention. This paper explores how Sher Shah Suri used cannons in his military campaigns and how this new gunpowder technology changed the way wars were fought in early 16th-century Bengal. The paper looks at how the use of artillery helped shift battlefield strategies and military history of the time. The research also examines the broader implications of gunpowder weaponry in destabilizing traditional fortifications and their impact on regional power dynamics and crucial influence on the establishment of centralized rule. Using historical texts, battle records, and archaeological evidence, it looks closely at key battles, especially in Gaur and Rajmahal, where artillery played a major role. By situating Sher Shah's use of artillery within the larger context of South Asian military history, the paper offers fresh insight into the technological and tactical shifts that underpinned the rise of early modern empires in Bengal and beyond.

Keywords: cannon technology, gunpowder warfare, military history, medieval Bengal, Sher Shah