

# ZAHEERUDDIN MOHAMMAD BABAR

Pages with reference to book, From 114 To 117

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Babar is well known in history as a self made man. His ancestral small state of Farghana was snatched from him. He then gradually collected an army and conquered India. He is also well known in literature. He wrote his autobiography which is read all over the world. It has been written in a simple language. Some periods of Babar's life are not mentioned in this autobiography and Historians do not know the cause of these disruptions.

It is interesting that in his memoirs Babar has also described his illnesses. His description is straight-forward like a patient describing his symptoms. At places the description is so long-that a diagnosis is possible while at other places it is briefly mentioned. However knowing the natural history of the disease in later period it is possible to diagnose some of his ailments. What follows is a medical history of Babar described by him in his memoirs, and supported by various references mentioned in the bibliography.

Babar was born on 6 Muharram 888 A.H. in Farghana, a small state in central Asia, north of Badakhshan now under USSR. River Saihun passes through this valley. According to Babar infective and 'Seasonal' fevers were a common health problem. Memoirs start when Babar ascended to the throne of Farghana. He was eleven years of age according to lunar calendar. We have no reference of his illness before that.

The first indisposition Babar describes is Typhoid fever when he was 15 years of age. It lasted 20-25 days. He developed fever which subsided after 4-5 days. But he got out of his bed before his temperature settled completely as he was in a hurry to recapture Andijan, his hometown. This early mobility resulted in relapse of high fever and he became so weak that his relatives and friends had lost all hopes of his recovery. However he recovered after two weeks.

In 904 A.H. when he was leaving Khujand at the age of 16 he suffered from fever short but miserable, may be, of viral origin. He was strong and this fever did not prevent him from riding 70 miles to Pashaghar after an unsuccessful attack on Rabat-e-Khawaja.

At 17 years of age he developed homosexual tendencies and started to love a boy in Urdu Bazar. Although never looked straight at his face nor spoke to him but wrote couplets in praise of that boy. One day accidentally he met the boy in the Bazar but was unable to look at him or even speak to him. This he says was due to his modesty and bashfulness.

In 908 A.H. when Babar was 20 years old he was wounded in a personal encounter with Ahmad Tambal. An arrow pierced into his right leg and a large wound was inflicted on his head. As the blow was blunt his skull remained intact. Blunt injuries to skull produce incised wounds which fully heal. Wound in right leg produced problems. Babar went to his younger uncle (MAMUN) Khanzada who noticed Babar limping and sent him to his court physician, a Jarrah by the name of Atika Baksh who bandaged the. wound and gave Babar a fibrous root to eat which cured the wound. Babar was impressed by this skilled Jarrah.

At 23 years of age (911 A.H.) he developed high fever of influenzal type, which appears to be of viral origin. It continued for 4-5 days. The fever was so high that Babar kept dozing off all the time but recovered without any ill effects. This was the time when he had conquered Kabul and was thinking of invading Qandhar but had to give up the idea due to fever.

In the same year during Ramzan he developed Sciatica. He had severe pain in his back and leg. He was unable to turn over from side to side; At that time he was returning from Hazara expedition and was stationed at Najr-au. His colleagues made a stretcher in which they carried him along the bank of Baran River and into the town of Bustan Sarai. Before he could recover from Sciatica a boil developed on his

left cheek which was incised and pus drained out. He also took a purgative to clean his bowels. This was the treatment during those days for preventing further recurrence of boils.

In 923 A.H. when Babar was 35 years old, he invaded Qandhar but fell ill again, No details of this illness are available and we do not know the diagnosis either. According to historians this illness was the cause of a treaty at Qandhar due to which Babar had to give up the idea of conquering Qandhar again.

In 925 A.H. at the age of 37 years Babar developed symptoms of Tuberculosis which became chronic in his future life and which he had to encounter from time to time. There is difference of opinion in different translations of his autobiography as to when it had first started. According to Mr. Rashid Akhtar Nadvi this was first encountered during 932 A.H. when Babar was going to conquer Delhi. Mrs. A.S. Beveridge in her English translation of his autobiography first describes this attack during 925 A.H. The English translation of his diary is more systematic and detailed. Full description of illness is given with period of convalescence and this appears to be a more correct description of the first attack. This has been translated by Mrs. Beveridge from Turkish manuscript, while Urdu translation of Mr. Nadvi is from a Persian translation by Abdul Rahim Khan-e-Khana (famous narrator of Akbar). Abdul Rahim had translated it from original Turkish manuscript.

The first acute episode of Tuberculosis started on 29 Jamadiul-Awwal and lasted about a month. Babar had fever and cough and he spat out blood. The fever was low grade, lasted for 2-3 days and then subsided but started again. He continued to perform some light duties during illness like seeing his visitors. He met Mulla Kabir from Kashgar and gave Khilat to Malik Shah Mansur a Yusufzai Afghan. He has also described various treatments that were given to him. He took Jullab (purgative) on 3 Jamadi-ul-Akhir and Darukar on 6 Jamadiul-Akhir. He also had a period of convalescence and on 25th Jamadiul-Akhir asked mulla Mahmud to recite Quran for his recovery.

In the same year on 13 Ramzan, Babar was in Kabul with Yusufzai Afghans when Baba Jan a servant of his gave him a horse whose saddle was loose. Babar got angered and hit Baba Jan on his face. He thought he had dislocated his fist but actually he had fractured 5th Metacarpal bone of his right hand. This was also confirmed by the fact that at the time of injury it did not pain but later he had excruciating pain, so severe that he could not write anything for a month. He had described how he was able to write a few words 32 days after injury a right time for this fracture to heal.

During the year 926 A.H. on 19 Muharram Babar hunted deers. Later they had a party in a garden and during the feast he dislocated his front tooth. He narrated that the first half was already broken the remaining half came out that day.

In 932 A.H. in the month of Safar he suffered a severe attack of cold. There is confusion among the Historians about the disease. Erskin calls it defluxion, deCourteille calls it rhume de. cerveau, Mrs. Beveridge describes it differently and Burnes has seen it commonly in Punjab. Shaikh Zain describes the disease as Nazla (cold) which confirms our view point.

During the same month on 22nd when Babar was near Bigram he had a second attack of Tuberculosis, seven years after the first attack. He was then 44 years old. He had fever and coughed out blood, which stopped the same day but started again two days later. Babar was very upset but it stopped after three days.

This happened while he was on his way to attack Delhi.

In 933 A.H. he had conquered Delhi and settled there when he fell a victim to an intrigue between a cook and mother of Sultan Ibrahim who had been defeated by Babar at Panipat. After Friday prayers Babar sat down to eat. He had eaten poisoned Indian curry without noticing any unpleasant flavour. He took other dishes as well and started feeling sick and went to bathroom and vomited again and again. It must have been a mild poison. He has not described its nature. He only described that he gave it to a dog which did not die but got up well after a day. His few companions also ate the same food and fell sick as well but got well in a few days. From the history it only appears to be a gastric irritant and hence it is difficult to be specific. He also named the antidotes he had taken which were general

antidotes and did not throw any light on the nature of poison itself. He was well in 3-4 days.

In the same year on 23rd Jamadiul-Awwal he totally gave up wine and with him three hundred of his musahibs also did the same.

In Ziqad of that year he had third episode of Tuberculosis. By that time severe stage had passed and disease had become chronic. There was no bleeding this time but there was fever and weakness. He had fever first for 17 days, he was better for ten days followed by fever for nine days. The second attack of fever started on 2 Zilhij. This continued during the next year (934 A.H.) and on 16th Muharram (36 days later) he again had fever and general weakness for 25-26 days. He was weak, thirsty and in pain. He was unable to sleep at night and was given sedative drugs. He gradually recovered from the attack but not for long.

In Jamadiul-Awwal of that year while crossing River Gumti near Lakhnau he bathed in river. Some water went into his right ear and he developed impacted wax and was unable to hear anything and his ear was painful. He has not indicated the treatments that he had taken and soon recovered.

In the second half of 934 A.H. he had recurrence of Tuberculosis, but there is a gap of about six months in his memoirs lasting to the beginning of 935 A.H. This gap was due to his illness which according to historians lasted for 40 days but throughout his illness he remained mentally active. During the illness he composed his Diwan known to historians as Rampur Diwan.

In 935 A.H. Babar was 47 years old. He was passing to the north of Gwalior on 11th Muharram when he developed earache. First he had an attack of cold. The ear was very painful. He was forced to take opium to kill the pain. The likely possibility is acute otitis media. In fact he took an excessive dose of opium but was able to sleep for a very short period after which he again fell sick and vomited a great deal the next day.

On 23rd Safar of that year he again fell ill with Tuberculosis. Perhaps he could not have, been completely fit from his last illness of 40 days in second half of 934 A.H. After a lapse of 11 days he has written in his memoirs that he was eating mercury (probably in compound). This must have been after his illness. During that period the compound was taken to help in his recovery. The present fever and weakness lasted for 15-20 days. During this illness he wrote a poem in praise of Khawaja Obaidullah in the hope that if he gets better the Khawaja must have been pleased with his poem.

On 13th Ramzan of that year he developed boils on the body which were very painful. He was treated by a Turkish physician whose treatment included holding the boils in steam. This was repeated till 23rd of Ramzan. The boils must have bursted after this painful treatment as Babar was well and able to swim river Ganges and continued opium compound (for pleasure) for a few days.

This is the last illness described by Babar himself in his memoirs. There are still 20 months before his death on 5th Jamadiul-Awwal, 937 A.H. Babar's health was gradually failing in those last months and everybody around him knew about it as described by Mr. Erskin in his history. Humayun and his mother were particularly concerned about Babar's health as she wanted to make sure that Humayun should succeed Babar. Babar himself must have been concerned about his illness and that of Humayun when Humayun was seriously ill during that time. This ought to have played a deciding role in Babar's decision to sacrifice his life for his son. This also snatched from Babar the will to fight his own disease. There is no first hand account of Babar's last illness. The nearest one we have is of Gulbadan Begum who was 8 years old at the time of Babar's death. She has written down whatever she heard. She tells us that after the sacrifice Babar fell ill for 2-3 months and his illness gradually grew worse. In this period Humayun recovered, went away and was called back. As he saw his father he said 'Oh is he so weak?' During this illness his mind was functioning normally. He asked his wife to arrange for the marriage of two of his daughters Gulrang and Gulcharhra Begums. In the last days Babar developed abdominal pain indicating that his Tuberculosis had spread to abdomen. Three days later Babar passed away.

Gulbadan Begum has described that Babar was gradually getting weaker during the last 5 years and she thought it was the result of poisoning of Babar by the mother of Ibrahim Lodhi. She also states that the physicians at that time also thought so. In fact this illness (Tuberculosis) started when he first coughed

blood 12 years earlier in 925 A.H. The famous-story about self surrender of Babar does not stand true to the facts of history and medicine.

### **Babar's Personality**

Babar was more than of average size, had great vigour, an athlete and fond of sports like hunting. He was an excellent swordsman and archer. He had personal encounters with his foes on many occasions and had such bodily strength that he used to run along battlements of forts having a man under each arm and leaping at the same time over gaps in the wall. Some idea of his strength can also be had by the fact that in 907 A.H. while passing by Khujand river in winter when it was frozen along the banks and it was so cold that several men died he had the courage to bathe in ice water of river and dipped 16 times.

### **ZAHEERUDDIN MOHAMMAD BABAR MEDICAL HISTORY AT A GLANCE**

888 A.H. (1483 A.D. Feb. 14)

6 Muharram-Born in Farghana

899 A.H. (1494 AD. June)

5 Ramzan-Ascended Throne of Farghana

909A.H. (1497-1498 A.D.)

Fever 20-25 days (Typhoid)

904A H. (1498-1499 A.D.)

Fever few days (Viral)

905 A.H. (1499-1500 A.D.)

Homosexual tendencies

908 A.H. (1502-1503 A.D.)

Wounded on head and right leg

911 A.H. (1505-1506 A.D.)

Fever 5-6 days (Viral), Sciatica, 40 days

Boil left cheek

923 A.H. (1516-1517 A.D.)

Fever ? Days.

925A.H. (1519 A.D.)

29Jamadiul-Awwal, Fever, coughed blood,

30days (Tuberculosis) 3 Ramzan, fracture

Fifth Metacarpal Bone right hand

926A.H. (1519-1520 A.D.)

29 Muharram, Dislocation of a front tooth

932 A.H. (1525-1526 A.D.)

8 Safar, Fever coughed blood 7 days

(Tuberculosis)

933 A.H. (1526-1527 A.D.)

16 Rabiul-Awwal, Poisoning of Babar

23 Jamadiul-Awwal, Babar renounces Wine

5 Ziqad, Fever weakness, 17 days, Tuber -culosis.

2 Zilhij, Fever, weakness 9 days, Tuber-culosis.

934 A.H. (1527-1528 A.D.)

16Muharram low grade fever, weakness,

26 days (Tuberculosis)

29 Jamadiul-Awwal, Impacted wax.

dated Lowgrade Fever, weakness, 40  
days (Tuberculosis)  
935 A.H. (1528-1529 A.D.)  
17 Muharram, Acute Otitis Media.  
23 Safar, Lowgrade fever, weakness, 15-20  
days (Tuberculosis)  
13 Ramzan. Boils & site  
937 A.H. (1530 A.D.)  
dated, Increasing weakness, Fever, 2-3  
months Abdominal pain.  
5 Jamadiul-Awwal, Death.

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