



Battles of Panipat

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First Battle of Panipat (1526)

The Battle

- The First Battle of Panipat (21 April 1526) fought near a small village of Panipat (Haryana), this marked the beginning of Mughal Empire in India.
- The battle was fought between the invading forces of **Zahir-ud-din Babur** and the last empire of the Delhi Sultanate, **Lodi Empire during the rule of Ibrahim Lodi**.

The Military Force

- Babur's forces numbered around 15,000 men with 20 to 24 pieces of field artillery.
- The fighting force of Ibrahim Lodi was around 30,000 to 40,000 men in total, along with at least 1000 war elephants.
- Babur's army used guns which proved to be decisive in the battlefield but the Sultan lacked any field artillery.

Moreover, the sound of the cannons used by Babur's army frightened Lodi's elephants, causing them to trample Lodi's own men.

Babur's Tactics

- The weapons were not all, it was Babur's tactics of **Tulughma and Araba** that led him to victory.
 - **Tulughma**: it meant dividing the whole army into various units, viz. the Left, the Right and the Centre.
 - The Left and Right divisions were further subdivided into Forward and Rear divisions.
 - Through this a small army could be used to surround the enemy from all the sides.
 - **Araba**: the centre forward division was then provided with carts (araba) which were placed in rows facing the enemy and tied to each other with animal hide ropes.

- Behind the Araba, cannons were placed which could be fired without any fear of being hit as they were shielded by the bullock carts which were held in place due to the hide ropes holding them together.

Result

- The Mughal forces of Babur, the Timurid ruler of Kabulistan, defeated the much larger ruling army of Ibrahim Lodi, Sultan of Delhi.
 - The victory enabled Babur to lay the foundations for the Indian Mughal Empire.
- Ibrahim Lodi died on the field of battle, abandoned by his feudatories and generals (many of whom were mercenaries).
 - Most of them changed their allegiance to the new master of Delhi.
 - However, the fate could have been turned in the favour of Sultan Ibrahim if he had survived another hour of fighting as Babur had no reserves left and his troops were rapidly tiring.

Note: This was one of the earliest battles involving gunpowder firearms and field artillery.

Second Battle of Panipat (1556)

The Second Battle of Panipat was fought between the **forces of Samrat Hem Chandra Vikramaditya**, popularly called **Hemu**, the Hindu king who was ruling North India from Delhi, and the **army of Akbar**, on November 5, 1556. It was a decisive victory for Akbar's generals Khan Zaman I and Bairam Khan.

Background

- **Samrat Hem Chandra Vikramaditya** or Hemu was a Hindu emperor in Delhi by virtue of defeating Akbar/Humayun's army in Battle for Delhi.
 - Hemu belonged to Rewari in present day Haryana, who earlier was an adviser to Sher Shah Suri's son Islam Shah from 1545 to 1553.
 - He had won 22 battles, as Prime Minister and Chief of Army of Islam Shah, during 1553 to 1556 to quell the rebellion by Afghan rebels against Sur regime.
- On January 24, 1556, the Mughal ruler Humayun died in Delhi and was succeeded by his son, **Akbar** at Kalanaur, who was only thirteen years old.
 - On February 14, 1556, Akbar was enthroned as the king.
 - At the time of his accession to the throne, the Mughal rule was confined to Kabul, Kandahar, parts of Delhi and Punjab.

The Battle

- Akbar and his guardian Bairam Khan **did not participate in the battle** and were stationed 5 Kos (8 miles) away from the war zone.
 - The 13 year old child King was not permitted to be present on the battlefield in person, instead he was provided with a **special guard of 5000** well trained and **most faithful troops** and was stationed at a safe distance far behind the battle lines.
 - The Mughal Vanguard consisted of **10,000 cavalry**, out of which 5000 were experienced veteran soldiers and were ready to meet the advancing army of Hemu.
- Hemu led his army himself. His army consisted of **1500 war elephants** and a vanguard of artillery park.

Hemu marched in excellent order with **30,000 practiced horsemen** composed of **Rajputs and Afghans**.

Result

- Hemu commanding his forces from atop an elephant was on a winning track and was about to rout Akbar's army when an arrow struck Hemu's squinting eye.
 - The arrow passed his brain clean out from the cup of his head, and he became unconscious.
 - Not seeing Hemu in his howdah (seat for riding on the back of a horse) , Hemu's army was in disarray and defeated in the ensuing confusion.
- Several hours after the war ended, dead Hemu was located and captured by Shah Quli Khan Mahram and brought to Akbar's tent in the camp in Panipat.
- Hemu's supporters constructed a Cenotaph at the site of his beheading, which still exists at the village Saudhapur, on Jind Road at Panipat.

Third Battle of Panipat (1761)

The Third Battle of Panipat took place on 14 January 1761, at Panipat, about 60 miles (95.5 km) north of Delhi between a northern expeditionary force of the **Maratha Empire** and **the King of Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Durrani** with two Indian Muslim allies—the Rohilla Afghans of the Doab, and Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Oudh.

Military Force

- Militarily, the battle pitted the French-supplied artillery and cavalry of the Marathas against the heavy cavalry and mounted artillery(zamburak and jezail) of the Afghans and Rohillas led by Ahmad Shah Durrani and Najib-ud-Daulah.

Ahmad Shah Durrani was also known as **Ahmad Shah Abdali**.
- The battle is considered one of the largest fought in the 18th century with the largest number of fatalities in a single day reported in a classic formation battle between two armies.

Background

- The decline of the Mughal Empire following the 27-year Mughal-Maratha war (1680–1707) had led to rapid territorial gains for the Maratha Empire.
 - Under Peshwa Baji Rao, Gujarat and Malwa came under Maratha control.
 - Finally, in 1737, Baji Rao defeated the Mughals on the outskirts of Delhi, and brought much of the former Mughal territories south of Delhi under Maratha control.
- This brought the Marathas into direct confrontation with the Durrani empire of Ahmad Shah Abdali.
- In 1759, he raised an army from the Pashtun tribes and made several gains against the smaller Maratha garrisons in Punjab.

He then joined with his Indian allies - the Rohilla Afghans of the Gangetic Doab - forming a broad coalition against the Marathas.

Role of Shuja-ud-Daulah

- Both the Marathas as well as Afghans tried to get the Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-Daulah, into their camp.

By late July, Shuja-ud-Daulah made the decision to join the Afghan-Rohilla coalition, preferring to join what was perceived as the 'army of Islam'.
- This was strategically a major loss for the Marathas, since Shuja provided much needed finances for the long Afghan stay in North India.
- It is doubtful whether the Afghan-Rohilla coalition would have the means to continue their conflict with the Marathas without Shuja's support.

Cutting off the Supplies

- In August, 1760, the Maratha camp finally reached Delhi and took the city.

There followed a series of skirmishes along the banks of the river Yamuna, and a battle at Kunjpura, which the Marathas won against an Afghan garrison of about 15,000.
- However, Abdali daringly crossed the river Yamuna in October at Baghpat, cutting off the Maratha camp from their base in Delhi.
 - This eventually turned into a two-month-long siege led by Abdali against the Marathas in the town of Panipat.
 - During the siege both sides tried to cut off the other's supplies at which the Afghans were considerably more effective; by the end of November 1760 they had cut off almost all food supplies into the besieged Maratha camp.
- The food in the Maratha camp ran out by late December or early January and cattle died by the thousands.

Reports of soldiers dying of starvation began to be heard in early January.

The Battle

- With no supplies and dying soldiers, the Maratha chiefs begged their commander, Sadashiv Rao Bhau, to be allowed to die in battle than perish by starvation.
In a desperate attempt to break the siege, the Marathas left their camp to march towards the Afghan camp.
- The battle lasted for several days and involved over 125,000 troops.
Protracted skirmishes occurred, with losses and gains on both sides.
- The forces led by Ahmad Shah Durrani came out victorious after destroying several Maratha flanks.
- The extent of the losses on both sides is believed that:
 - between 60,000–70,000 were killed in fighting
 - the numbers of injured and prisoners taken vary considerably. about 40,000 Maratha prisoners were slaughtered in cold blood the day after the battle.

Result

- The result of the battle was the halting of further Maratha advances in the north, and a destabilization of their territories, for roughly 10 years.
This period of 10 years is marked by the rule of Peshwa Madhavrao, who is credited with the revival of Maratha domination following the defeat at Panipat.
- In 1771, 10 years after Panipat, Peshwa Madhavrao sent a large Maratha army into North India in an expedition that was meant to:
 - Re-establish the Maratha domination in North India
 - Punish refractory powers that had either sided with the Afghans, such as the Rohillas, or had shaken off Maratha domination after Panipat.
- The success of this campaign can be seen as the last saga of the long story of Panipat.

Note:

- What stands out in all the three battles of Panipat is the fact that the dispute or the reason for war was never the city of Panipat.
- Panipat was always an entrance to Delhi.
Historically, anyone from the North-West, who wanted to capture Delhi, had to come through the Khyber pass and then Punjab.