

Third Battle of Panipat

The **Third Battle of Panipat** took place on 14 January 1761 at Panipat, about 60 miles (97 km) north of Delhi, between a northern expeditionary force of the Maratha Empire and invading forces of the King of Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Abdali, supported by two Indian allies—the Rohilla Najib-ud-daulah Afghans of the Doab, and Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Awadh. Militarily, the battle pitted the artillery and cavalry of the Marathas against the heavy cavalry and mounted artillery (zamburak and jezail) of the Afghans and Rohillas led by Abdali and Najib-ud-Daulah, both ethnic Afghans. The battle is considered one of the largest and most eventful fought in the 18th century^[5] and has perhaps the largest number of fatalities in a single day reported in a classic formation battle between two armies.

The specific site of the battle itself is disputed by historians, but most consider it to have occurred somewhere near modern-day Kaalaa Aamb and Sanauli Road. 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 heavily disputed by historians, but it is believed that between 60,000–70,000 were killed in fighting, while the numbers of injured and prisoners taken vary considerably. According to the single best eyewitness chronicle—the *bakhar* by Shuja-ud-Daulah's Diwan Kashi Raj—about 40,000 Maratha prisoners were slaughtered in cold blood the day after the battle.^[4] Grant Duff includes an interview of a survivor of these massacres in his *History of the Marathas* and generally corroborates this number. Shejwalkar, whose monograph *Panipat 1761* is often regarded as the single best secondary source on the battle, says that "not less than 100,000 Marathas (soldiers and non-combatants) perished during and after the battle."^[3]

The result of the battle was the halting of further Maratha advances in the north, and a destabilisation of their territories, for roughly ten years. This period is marked by the rule of Peshwa Madhavrao, who is credited with the revival of Maratha domination following the defeat at Panipat. In 1771, ten years after Panipat, he sent a large Maratha army into northern India in an expedition that was meant to re-establish Maratha domination in that area and 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 chapter of the long story of Panipat.^[6]

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Third Battle of Panipat



The Third Battle of Panipat, 14 January 1761, Hafiz Rahmat Khan, standing right of Ahmad Shah Durrani, who is shown sitting on a brown horse.

Date	14 January 1761
Location	Panipat (in present-day Haryana, India) 29.39°N 76.97°E
Result	Afghan victory ^[1]
Territorial changes	Marathas lost suzerainty over Punjab till north of Sutlej river to the Afghans. Ahmad Shah Durrani vacates Delhi soon after the battle. Maratha expansion checked for the time being.

Belligerents

Durrani Empire	Maratha Empire
Supported by:	

Commanders and leaders

Ahmad Shah Durrani (Shah of Durrani Empire)	Sadashivrao Bhau (commander-in-chief of Maratha Army)(KIA)
Timur Shah Durrani	
Wazir Wali Khan ^[2]	
Shah Pasand Khan ^[2]	
Jahan Khan ^[2]	
Shuja-ud-Daula	Vishwasrao(KIA)
Najib-ud-Daula	Malharrao Holkar
Hafiz Rahmat Khan ^[2]	Mahadji

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Background

Decline of the Mughal Empire

The decline of the Mughal Empire following the 27-year Mughal-Maratha war (1680–1707) led to rapid territorial gains for the Maratha Empire. Under Peshwa Baji Rao, Gujarat, Malwa and Rajputana 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. Baji Rao's son Balaji Baji Rao further increased the territory under Maratha control by invading Punjab in 1758.

Raghunathrao's letter to the Peshwa, 4 May 1758^[7]

“ Lahore, Multan, Kashmir and other subahs on this side of Attock are under our rule for the most part, and places which have not come under our rule we shall soon bring under us. Ahmad Shah Durrani's son Timur Shah Durrani and Jahan Khan have been pursued by our troops, and their troops completely looted. Both of them have now reached Peshawar with a few broken troops... So Ahmad Shah Durrani has returned to Kandahar with some 12-14 thousand broken troops.. Thus all have risen against Ahmad who has lost control over the region. We have decided to extend our rule up to Kandahar.

”

 Dundhi Khan^[2]
 Banghas Khan^[2]

Shinde
 Ibrahim Khan Gardi
 Jankoji Shinde
 Shamsher Bahadur Bhoite
 Rege Purandare
 Vinchurkar (Infantry & Cavalry)
 Sidoji Gharge

Strength

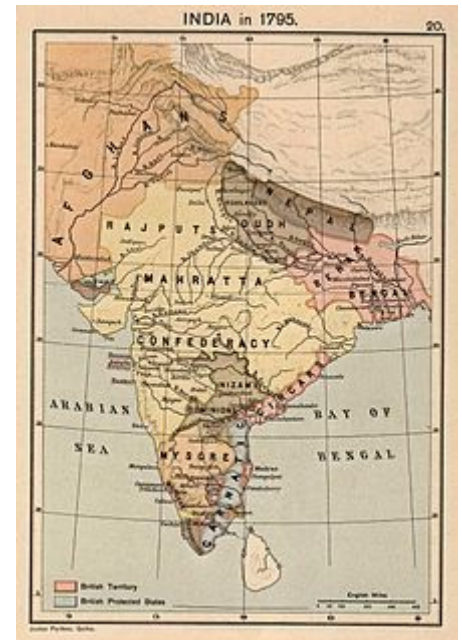
42,000 cavalry	20,000 cavalry
38,000 infantry	15,000
10,000 reserves	infantry(divided
4,000 personal guards	to 9 battalions of
5,000 Qizilbash	Gardi rifle
120–130 pieces of	infantry)
cannon	15,000 Pindaris
large numbers of	200 pieces of
irregulars	artillery. The
totally an army of	force was
100,000.	accompanied by
	300,000 non-
	combatants
	(pilgrims and
	camp-followers)
	totally an army
	of 50,000-
	70,000.

Casualties and losses

~40,000 combatants killed. ^{[3][4]}	Estimates between 30,000 and 40,000 combatants killed in the battle. Another 40,000–70,000 non-combatants massacred following the battle. ^{[3][4]}
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This brought the Marathas into direct confrontation with the Durrani empire of Ahmad Shah Abdali (also known as Ahmad Shah Durrani). In 1759 he raised an army from the Pashtun and Baloch 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.

The Marathas, under the command of Sadashivrao Bhau, responded by gathering an army of between 45,000–60,000, which was accompanied by roughly 200,000 non-combatants, a number of whom were pilgrims desirous of making pilgrimages to Hindu holy sites in northern India. The Marathas started their northward journey from Patdur on 14 March 1760. Both sides 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.



Extent of the Maratha Empire, 1795

Rise of the Marathas

Grant Duff, describing the Maratha army:^[8]

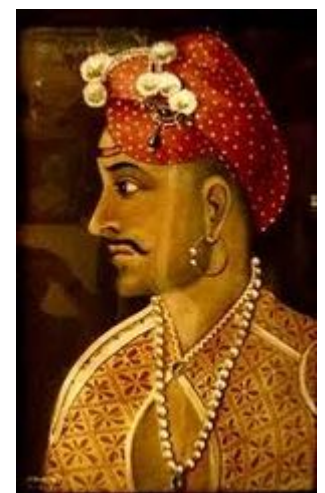
“ The lofty and spacious tents, lined with silks and broadcloths, were surmounted by large gilded ornaments, conspicuous at a distance... Vast numbers of elephants, flags of all descriptions, the finest horses, magnificently caparisoned ... seemed to be collected from every quarter ... it was an imitation of the more becoming and tasteful array of the Mughuls in the zenith of their glory. ”

The Marathas had gained control of a considerable part of India in the intervening period (1707–1757). In 1758 they occupied Delhi, captured Lahore and drove out Timur Shah Durrani,^[9] the son and viceroy of the Afghan ruler, Ahmad Shah Abdali. This was the high-water mark of the Maratha expansion, where the boundaries of their empire extended in the north to the Indus and the Himalayas, and in the south nearly to the extremity of the peninsula. This territory was ruled through the Peshwa, who talked of placing his son Vishwasrao on the Mughal throne. However, Delhi still remained under the nominal control of Mughals, key Muslim intellectuals including Shah Waliullah and other Muslim clergy in India who were alarmed at these developments. In desperation they appealed to Ahmad Shah Abdali, the ruler of Afghanistan, to halt the threat.^[10]

Prelude

Ahmad Shah Durrani (*Ahmad Shah Abdali*), angered by the news from his son and his allies, was unwilling to allow the Marathas' spread go unchecked. By the end of 1759 Abdali with his Afghan tribes and his Rohilla ally Najib Khan had reached Lahore as well as Delhi and defeated the smaller enemy garrisons. Ahmed Shah, at this point, withdrew his army to Anupshahr, on the frontier of the Rohilla country, where he successfully convinced the Nawab of Oudh Shuja-ud-Daula to join his alliance against the Marathas. The Marathas had earlier helped Safdarjung (father of Shuja) in defeating Rohillas in Farrukhabad.^[11]

The Marathas under Sadashivrao Bhau (referred to as the Bhau or Bhao in sources) responded to the news of the Afghans' return to North India by raising an army, and they marched North. Bhau's force was bolstered by some Maratha forces under Holkar, Scindia, Gaikwad and Govind Pant Bunde. Suraj Mal (the Jat ruler of Bharatpur) also had joined Bhausahab initially. This combined army captured the Mughal capital, Delhi, from an Afghan garrison in December 1759.^[12] Delhi had been reduced to ashes many times due to previous invasions, and in addition there being acute shortage of



Sadashivrao Bhau

supplies in the Maratha camp. Bhau ordered the sacking of the already depopulated city.^[13] He is said to have planned to place his nephew and the Peshwa's son, Vishwasrao, on the Mughal throne. The Jats did not support the Marathas. Their withdrawal from the ensuing battle was to play a crucial role in its result. Abdali drew first blood by attacking a small Maratha army led by Dattaji Shinde at Burari Ghat. Dattaji was killed in the battle.^[14]

Initial Skirmishes

With both sides poised for battle, there followed much maneuvering, with skirmishes between the two armies fought at Karnal and Kunjpura. Kunjpura, on the banks of the Yamuna river 60 miles to the north of Delhi, was stormed by the Marathas and the whole Afghan garrison was killed or enslaved.^[15] Marathas achieved a rather easy victory at Kunjpura against an army of 15,000 Afghans posted there. Some of Abdali's best generals were killed. Ahmad Shah was encamped on the left bank of the Yamuna River, which was swollen by rains, and was powerless to aid the garrison. The massacre of the Kunjpura garrison, within sight of the Durrani camp, exasperated Abdali to such an extent that he ordered crossing of the river at all costs.^[16] Ahmed Shah and his allies on 17 October 1760, broke up from Shahdara, marching south. Taking a calculated risk, Abdali plunged into the river, followed by his bodyguards and troops. Between 23 and 25 October they were able to cross at Baghpat (a small town about 24 miles up the river), unopposed by the Marathas who were still preoccupied with the sacking of Kunjpura.^[17]

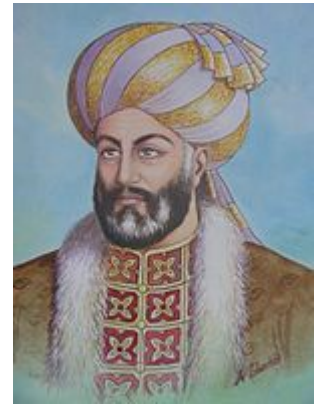
After the Marathas failed to prevent Abdali's forces from crossing the Yamuna River, they set up defensive works in the ground near Panipat, thereby blocking his access back to Afghanistan, just as Abdali's forces blocked theirs to the south. However, on the afternoon of 26th October, Ahmad Shah's advance guard reached Sambalka, about halfway between Sonepat and Panipat, where they encountered the vanguard of the Marathas. A fierce skirmish ensued, in which the Afghans lost 1000 men but drove the Marathas back to their main body, which kept retreating slowly for several days. This led to the partial encirclement of the Maratha army. In skirmishes that followed, Govind Pant Bunde, with 10,000 light cavalry who weren't formally trained soldiers, was on a foraging mission with about 500 men. They were surprised by an Afghan force near Meerut, and in the ensuing fight, Bunde was killed. This was followed by the loss of a contingent of 2,000 Maratha soldiers who had left Delhi to deliver money and rations to Panipat. This completed the encirclement, as Ahmad Shah had cut off the Maratha army's supply lines.^[18]

With supplies and stores dwindling, tensions started rising in the Maratha camp. Initially the Marathas had moved in almost 150 pieces of modern long-range, French-made artillery. With a range of several kilometres, these guns were some of the best of the time. The Marathas' plan was to lure the Afghan army to confront them while they had close artillery support.^[19]

Preliminary moves

During the next two months of the siege, constant skirmishes and duels took place between units from either side. In one of these Najib lost 3,000 of his Rohillas and was very nearly killed himself. Facing a potential stalemate, Abdali decided to seek terms, which Bhau was willing to consider. However, Najib Khan delayed any chance of an agreement with an appeal on religious grounds and sowed doubt about whether the Marathas would honour any agreement.^[20]

After the Marathas moved from Kunjpura to Panipat, Diler Khan Marwat, with his father Alam Khan Marwat and a force of 2500 Pashtuns, attacked and took control of Kunjpura, where there was a Maratha garrison of 700–800 soldiers. At that time Atai Khan Baluch, son of the Wazir of Abdali, came from Afghanistan with 10,000 cavalry and cut off the supplies to the Marathas.^[21] The Marathas at Panipat were surrounded by Abdali in the south, Pashtun Tribes (Yousuf Zai, Afridi, Khattak) in the east, Shuja, Atai Khan and others in the north and other Pashtun tribes (Gandapur Marwat, Durrani and Kakars) in the west.^[22]



Ahmad Shah Durrani



Engraving of a Maratha soldier by James Forbes.



Afghan royal soldiers of the Durrani Empire.

Unable to continue without supplies or wait for reinforcements any longer, Bhau decided to break the siege. His plan was to pulverise the enemy formations with cannon fire and not to employ his cavalry until the Afghans were thoroughly softened up. With the Afghans broken, he would move camp in a defensive formation towards Delhi, where they were assured supplies.^[23]

Formations

With the Maratha chiefs pressurizing Sadashiv Rao Bhau, to go to battle rather than perish by starvation, on 13th January, the Marathas left their camp before dawn and marched south towards the Afghan camp in a desperate attempt to break the siege. The two armies came face-to-face around 8:00 a.m.^[24]

The Maratha lines began a little to the north of Kala Amb. They had thus blocked the northward path of Abdali's troops and at the same time were blocked from heading south—in the direction of Delhi, where they could get badly needed supplies—by those same troops. Bhau, with the Peshwa's son and the royal guard (Huzurat), was in the centre. The left wing consisted of the *Gardis* under Ibrahim Khan. Holkar and Sindhia were on the extreme right.^[25]

The Maratha line was formed up some 12 km across, with the artillery in front, protected by infantry, pikemen, musketeers and bowmen. The cavalry was instructed to wait behind the artillery and bayonet-wielding musketeers, ready to be thrown in when control of the battlefield had been fully established. Behind this line was another ring of 30,000 young Maratha soldiers who were not battle-tested, and then the civilians. Many were ordinary men, women and children on their pilgrimage to Hindu holy places and shrines. Behind the civilians was yet another protective infantry line, of young, inexperienced soldiers.^[26]

On the other side the Afghans formed a somewhat similar line, a few metres to the south of today's Sanauli Road. Their left was being formed by Najib and their right by two brigades of troops. Their left centre was led by two Viziers, Shuja-ud-daulah with 3,000 soldiers and 50–60 cannons and Ahmad Shah's Vizier Shah Wali with a choice body of 19,000 mailed Afghan horsemen.^[27] The right centre consisted of 15,000 Rohillas under Hafiz Rahmat and other chiefs of the Rohilla Pathans. Pasand Khan covered the left wing with 5,000 cavalry, Barkurdar Khan and Amir Beg covered the right with 3,000 Rohilla cavalry. Long-range musketeers were also present during the battle. In this order the army of Ahmed Shah moved forward, leaving him at his preferred post in the centre, which was now in the rear of the line, from where he could watch and direct the battle.^[28]

Battle

Early phases

Before dawn on 14 January 1761, the Maratha troops broke their fast with the last remaining grain in the camp and prepared for combat. They emerged from the trenches, pushing the artillery into position on their prearranged lines, some 2 km from the Afghans. Seeing that the battle was on, Ahmad Shah positioned his 60 smooth-bore cannon and opened fire.^[29]

The initial attack was led by the Maratha left flank under Ibrahim Khan, who advanced his infantry in formation against the Rohillas and Shah Pasand Khan. The first salvos from the Maratha artillery went over the Afghans' heads and did very little damage. Nevertheless, the first Afghan attack by Najib Khan's Rohillas broken by Maratha bowmen and pikemen, along with a unit of the famed Gardi musketeers stationed close to the artillery positions. The second and subsequent salvos were fired at point-blank range into the Afghan ranks. The resulting carnage sent the Rohillas reeling back to their lines, leaving the battlefield in the hands of Ibrahim for the next three hours, during which the 8,000 Gardi musketeers killed about 12,000 Rohillas.^[30]

In the second phase, Bhau himself led the charge against the left-of-center Afghan forces, under the Afghan Vizier Shah Wali Khan. The sheer force of the attack nearly broke the Afghan lines, and the Afghan soldiers started to desert their positions in the confusion. Desperately trying to rally his forces, Shah Wali appealed to Shuja ud Daulah for assistance. However, the Nawab did not break from his position, effectively splitting the Afghan force's center. Despite Bhau's success, the over-enthusiasm of the charge, the attack didn't achieve complete success as many of the half-starved Maratha mounts were exhausted.^[31]

Final phase

The Marathas, under Scindia, attacked Najib. Najib successfully fought a defensive action, however, keeping Scindia's forces at bay. By noon it looked as though Bhau would clinch victory for the Marathas once again. The Afghan left flank still held its own, but the centre was cut in two and the right was almost destroyed. Ahmad Shah had watched the fortunes of the battle from his tent, guarded by the still unbroken forces on his left. He sent his bodyguards to call up his 15,000 reserve troops from his camp and arranged them as a column in front of his cavalry of musketeers (Qizilbash) and 2,000 swivel-mounted *shutarnaals* or Ushtranaal—cannons—on the backs of camels.^[32]

The shaturnals, because of their positioning on camels, could fire an extensive salvo over the heads of their own infantry, at the Maratha cavalry. The Maratha cavalry was unable to withstand the muskets and camel-mounted swivel cannons of the Afghans. They could be fired without the rider having to dismount and were especially effective against fast-moving cavalry. Abdali therefore, sent 500 of his own bodyguards with orders to raise all able-bodied men out of camp and send them to the front. He sent 1,500 more to punish the front-line troops who attempted to flee the battle and kill without mercy any soldier who would not return to the fight. These extra troops, along with 4,000 of his reserve troops, went to support the broken ranks of the Rohillas on the right. The remainder of the reserve, 10,000 strong, were sent to the aid of Shah Wali, still labouring unequally against the Bhau in the centre of the field. These mailed warriors were to charge with the Vizier in close order and at full gallop. Whenever they charged the enemy in front, the chief of the staf and Najib were directed to fall upon either flank!^[33]

With their own men in the firing line, the Maratha artillery could not respond to the shathurnals and the cavalry charge. Some 7,000 Maratha cavalry and infantry were killed before the hand-to-hand fighting began at around 14:00 hrs. By 16:00 hrs, the tired Maratha infantry began to succumb to the onslaught of attacks from fresh Afghan reserves, protected by armoured leather jackets.^[34]

Outflanked

Sadashivrao Bhau who had not kept any reserves, seeing his forward lines dwindling, civilians behind and upon seeing Vishwasrao disappear in the midst of the fighting, felt he had no choice but to come down from his elephant and lead the battle.^[9]

Taking advantage of this, some Afghan soldiers who had been captured by the Marathas earlier ~~during~~ the siege of Kunjpura revolted. The slaves deliberately spread rumours about the defeat of the Marathas. This brought confusion and great consternation to the Maratha soldiers, who thought that the enemy had attacked from the rear. Some Maratha troops, seeing that their general had disappeared from his elephant, panicked and began to flee.^[35]

Abdali had given a part of his army the task of surrounding and killing the Gardis, who were at the leftmost part of the Maratha army. Bhausahab had ordered Vitthal Vinchurkar (with 1500 cavalry) and Damaji Gaikwad (with 2500 cavalry) to protect the Gardis. However, after seeing the Gardis fight, they lost their patience and decided to fight the Rohillas themselves. Thus, they broke their position and went all out on the Rohillas. The Rohilla riflemen started accurately firing at the Maratha cavalry, which was equipped only with swords. This gave the Rohillas the opportunity to encircle the Gardis and outflank the Maratha centre while Shah Wali pressed on attacking the front. Thus the Gardis were left defenseless and started falling one by one.^[36]

Vishwasrao had already been killed by a shot to the head. Bhau and his royal Guard fought till the end, the Maratha leader having three horses shot out from under him. At this stage, Holkar, realising the battle was lost, broke from the Maratha left flank and retreated.^[37] The Maratha front lines remained largely intact, with some of their artillery units fighting until sunset. Choosing not to launch a night attack, many Maratha troops escaped that night. Bhau's wife Parvatibai, who was assisting in the administration of the Maratha camp, escaped to Pune with her bodyguard, Janu Bhintada. Some 15,000 soldiers managed to reach Gwalior.^[9]

Reasons for the outcome

Durrani had both numeric as well as qualitative superiority over Marathas. The combined Afghan army was much larger than that of Marathas. Though the infantry of Marathas was organized along European lines and their army had some of the best French-made guns of the time, their artillery was static and lacked mobility against the fast-moving Afghan forces. The heavy mounted artillery of Afghans proved much better in the battlefield than the light artillery of Marathas.^[38] None of the other Hindu Kings joined forces to

fight Abdali. Allies of Abdali, namely, Najib, Shuja and the Rohillas knew North India very well. He was also diplomatic, striking agreements with Hindu leaders, especially the Jats and Rajputs, and former rivals like the Nawab of Awadh, appealing to him in the name of religion.^[39]

Moreover, the senior Maratha chiefs constantly bickered with one another. Each had ambitions of carving out their independent states and had no interest in fighting against a common enemy.^[40] Some of them did not support the idea of a *round battle* and wanted to fight using guerilla tactics instead of charging the enemy head-on. The Marathas were fighting alone at a place which was 1000 miles away from their capital Pune.^[41]

Peshwa's decision to appoint Sadashivrao Bhau as the Supreme Commander instead of Malharrao Holkar or Raghunathrao proved to be an unfortunate one, as Sadashivrao was totally ignorant of the political and military situation in North India.^[42]

If Holkar had remained in the battlefield, the Maratha defeat would have been delayed but not averted. Ahmad Shah's superiority in pitched battle could have been negated if the Marathas had conducted their traditional ganimi kava, or guerrilla warfare, as advised by Malharrao Holkar in Punjab and in north India. Abdali was in no position to maintain his field army in India indefinitely.^[43]

Massacres after the battle

The Afghan cavalry and pikemen ran wild through the streets of Panipat, killing tens of thousands of Maratha soldiers and civilians.^{[3][4]} The women and children seeking refuge in streets of Panipat were hounded back in Afghan camps as slaves. Children over 14 were beheaded before their own mothers and sisters. Afghan officers who had lost their kin in battle were permitted to carry out massacres of 'infidel' Hindus the next day also, in Panipat and the surrounding area.^[44] They arranged victory mounds of severed heads outside their camps. According to the single best eye-witness chronicle – the bakhar by Shuja-ud-Daula's Diwan Kashi Raj – about 40,000 Maratha prisoners were slaughtered in cold blood the day after the battle.^{[3][4]} According to Mr. Hamilton of Bombay Gazette about half a million Marathi people were present there in Panipat town and he gives a figure of 40,000 prisoners as executed by Afghans. Many of the fleeing Maratha women jumped into the Panipat wells rather than risk rape and dishonour.^[44]

All of the prisoners were transported on bullock carts camels and elephants in bamboo cages.^[44]

Siyar-ut-Mutakhirin says:^[44]

“ The unhappy prisoners were paraded in long lines, given a little parched grain and a drink of water, and beheaded... and the women and children who survived were driven off as slaves – twenty-two thousand, many of them of the highest rank in the land. ”

Aftermath

The bodies of Vishwasrao and Bhau were recovered by the Marathas and were cremated according to their custom.^[45] Bhau's wife Parvatibai was saved by Holkar per the directions of Bhau, and eventually returned to Pune.

Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao uninformed about the state of his army, was crossing the Narmada with reinforcements when he heard of the defeat. He returned to Pune and never recovered from the shock of the debacle at Panipat.^[9]

Jankoji Scindia was taken prisoner and executed at the instigation of Najib. Ibrahim Khan Gardi was tortured and executed by enraged Afghan soldiers.^[45] The Marathas never fully recovered from the loss at Panipat, but they remained the predominant military power in India and managed to retake Delhi 10 years later. However, their claim over all of India ended with the three Anglo-Maratha Wars, almost 50 years after Panipat.^[46]

The Jats under Suraj Mal benefited significantly from not participating in the Battle of Panipat. They provided considerable assistance to the Maratha soldiers and civilians who escaped the fighting. Suraj Mal himself was killed in battle against Najib-ud-Daula in 1763. Suraj Mal died on 25 December 1763 fighting the Rohillas under Najib, the very people against whom he could have helped the Marathas.

Ahmad Shah's victory left him, in the short term, the undisputed master of North India. However, his alliance quickly unravelled amidst squabbles between his generals and other princes, the increasing restlessness of his soldiers over pay, the increasing Indian heat and arrival of the news that Marathas had organised another 100,000 men in the south to avenge their loss and rescue captured prisoners.

Though Abdali won the battle, he also had heavy casualties on his side and sought peace with the Marathas. Abdali sent a letter to Nanasahb Peshwa (who was moving towards Delhi, albeit at a very slow pace to join Bhau against Abdali) appealing to the Peshwa that he was not the one who attacked Bhau and was just defending himself. Abdali wrote in his letter to Peshwa on 10 February 1761:^[47]

“ There is no reason to have animosity amongst us. Your son Vishwasrao and your brother Sadashivrao died in battle, was unfortunate. Bhau started the battle, so I had to fight back unwillingly. Yet I feel sorry for his death. Please continue your guardianship of Delhi as before, to that I have no opposition. Only let Punjab until Sutlaj remain with us. Reinstall Shah Alam on Delhi's throne as you did before and let there be peace and friendship between us, this is my ardent desire. Grant me that desire. ”

These circumstances forced Abdali to leave India at the earliest, never to return again. Before departing, he ordered the Indian chiefs, through a Royal Firman (order) (including Clive of India), to recognise Shah Alam II as Emperor.^[48]

Ahmad Shah also appointed Najib-ud-Daula as ostensible regent to the Mughal Emperor. In addition, Najib and Munir-ud-daulah agreed to pay to Abdali, on behalf of the Mughal king, an annual tribute of four million rupees.^[48] This was to be Ahmad Shah's final major expedition to North India, as he became increasingly preoccupied with the increasingly successful rebellions by the Sikhs.^[49] Abdali, haven't had achieved much from the battle of Panipat, died soon after on 16 October 1772 in Kandahar Province.

Shah Shuja was to regret his decision to join the Afghan forces. In time his forces became embroiled in clashes between the orthodox Sunni Afghans and his own Shia followers. He is alleged to have later secretly sent letters to Bhausahb through his spies regretting his decision to join Abdali.

After the Battle of Panipat the services of the Rohillas were rewarded by grants of Shikohabad to Nawab Faiz-ullah Khan and of Jalesar and Firozabad to Nawab Sadullah Khan. Najib Khan proved to be an effective ruler. However, after his death in 1770, the Rohillas were defeated by the British East India Company. Najib died on 30 October 1770.^[50]

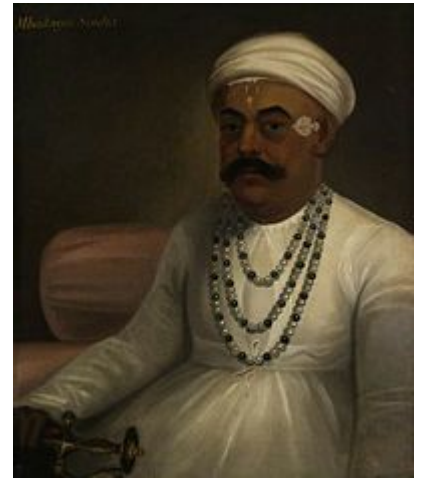
Legacy

The valour displayed by the Marathas was praised by Ahmad Shah Abdali.^[51]

“ The Marathas fought with the greatest valour which was beyond the capacity of other races. These dauntless blood-shedders didn't fall short in fighting and doing glorious deeds. But ultimately we won with our superior tactics and with the grace of the Divine Lord. ”

The Third Battle of Panipat saw an enormous number of deaths and injuries in a single day of battle. It was the last major battle between indigenous South Asian military powers until the creation of Pakistan and India in 1947.

To save their kingdom, the Mughals once again changed sides and welcomed the Afghans to Delhi. The Mughals remained in nominal control over small areas of India, but were never a force again. The empire officially ended in 1857 when its last emperor, Bahadur Shah II, was accused of being involved in the Sepoy Mutiny and exiled.



Mahadaji Shinde restored the Maratha domination on northern India, within a decade after the war.

The Marathas' expansion was delayed due to the battle, and infighting soon broke out within the empire. They recovered their position under the next Peshwa Madhavrao I and by 1771 were back in control of the north, finally occupying Delhi. However, after the death of Madhavrao, due to infighting and increasing pressure from the British, their claims to empire only officially ended in 1818 after three wars with the British.

Meanwhile, the Sikhs—whose rebellion was the original reason Ahmad invaded—were left largely untouched by the battle. They soon retook Lahore. When Ahmad Shah returned in March 1764 he was forced to break off his siege after only two weeks due to a rebellion in Afghanistan. He returned again in 1767, but was unable to win any decisive battle. With his own troops complaining about not being paid, he eventually abandoned the district to the Sikhs, who remained in control until 1849 when it was annexed by the British Empire.

The battle was referred to in Rudyard Kipling's poem "With Scindia to Delhi".

“ Our hands and scarfs were saffron-dyed for signal of despair,
When we went forth to Paniput to battle with the Mlech-,
Ere we came back from Paniput and left a kingdom there. ”

It is, however, also remembered as a scene of valour on both sides. Santaji Wagh's corpse was found with over 40 mortal wounds. The bravery of Vishwas Rao, the Peshwa's son, and Sadashiv Bhau was acknowledged even by the Afghans.^[52]

In Popular Culture

The film Panipat, was announced by director Ashutosh Gowariker. Starring Arjun Kapoor, Sanjay Dutt and Kriti Sanon. Based on the Third Battle of Panipat.

See also

- First Battle of Panipat
- Second Battle of Panipat
- Battle of Sialkot (1761)
- Battle of Gujranwala (1761)

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