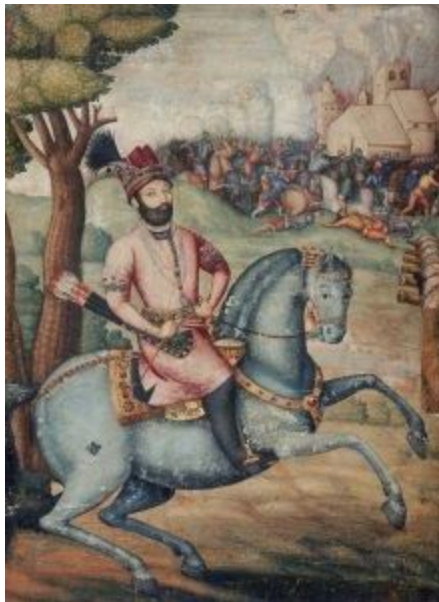


Battle of Karnal - [February 24, 1739] This Day in History

This article gives a brief introduction of Nader Shah, an Emperor of the Persian Empire. It gives details on the expanse of the territory ruled by him and his military expedition to India, his fight against the Mughal Empire, and the massive defeat the Mughals had to face in the hands of a smaller but tactically brilliant Persian Army in the Battle of Karnal. This defeat of Mughals also led to wide-scale destruction and looting of Delhi by the Persian Army.

Aspirants would find this article very helpful while preparing for the IAS Exam.

Battle of Karnal - Background



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1. Nader Shah was the Shahanshah of the Persian Empire. He belonged to the Afsharid dynasty. He was an ingenious military man who created a vast empire out of his sheer tactics and brilliant military reforms.
2. During its zenith, Shah's empire stretched from the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf and included the modern-day countries of Georgia, Oman, Armenia, Pakistan, etc.
3. He was constantly engaged in battles with the warlords in Afghanistan. Many of them who were defeated by Shah had taken asylum in the border areas with the Mughal Empire. Shah had requested the governors of northern India under the Mughals to turn

over the escaped Afghan chieftains to him. This was largely ignored by the Mughals and Shah used this as a pretext to go to war.

4. The Mughal Emperor at that time was Muhammad Shah. His reign saw a rapid decline of the once formidable Mughal Empire.
5. Nader Shah, along with his troops, entered the Mughal territory from Kandahar. The frontier governors resisted the Persian attack briefly but were routed by the invading army.
6. On November 16, 1739, Shah led his troops out of Peshawar and towards Punjab's Sindh River. Lahore's governor tried to resist but submitted in the face of a stronger force. He secured his position as the ruler of Lahore by giving Shah Rs.2 million.
7. Upon hearing of the advancing Persian army, Muhammad Shah marched his forces out of Delhi in order to meet the invading army and prevent their entry into his capital. He led a huge army of about 300000 men along with about 2000 elephants and 3000 guns.

The course of the Battle of Karnal

1. Nader Shah's army was less than one-fifth the size of his opponent's. But, it was the better trained, the better equipped and battle-ready army of the two.
2. Nader Shah saw to it that his army had modern weaponry and lighter arms. His cannons and weapons were more mobile and easy to handle than the Mughal army's outdated ammunition. The Persian army also had zamburaks (cannons mounted on camels) which provided easy mobility to heavy guns. The Persian army was composed of uniformly drilled soldiers from the Persian state and also from the areas which were subjugated by Nader Shah. The Mughal army, although large, was composed of different factions and there was no cohesiveness in them.
3. The Mughal army reached Karnal, about 120 km north of Delhi (in the modern Indian state of Haryana). On 24 February, the two forces met in Karnal for battle.
4. Using a combination of surveillance and intelligence techniques, and also using his shrewd military tactics, Nader Shah's smaller force defeated the Mughal army in a day's battle. His forces wreaked havoc among the hapless Mughal soldiers. Many of their high-ranking officers were either killed or taken prisoner.

The aftermath of the battle of Karnal

1. About 400 Mughal officers and probably 20 – 30 thousand soldiers were killed in the battle. Muhammad Shah surrendered and he had to take Nader Shah to his capital, Delhi. There the entire treasury of the Mughal emperor was looted by the Persians.
2. The Persian soldiers initially did not plunder the city of Delhi but due to a violent scuffle involving some people, Nader Shah ordered the sack of Delhi. His soldiers indulged in a brutal massacre of the city's inhabitants. People were killed in their homes and their wealth looted. About 30000 people are believed to have been killed. The brutalities were so intense that many people killed themselves and their family rather than surrender to the Persian soldiers. The city was strewn with corpses according to some sources.

3. The sack of Delhi lasted for several days after which Nader Shah ordered his men to cease.
4. In May 1739, Nader Shah and his troops left the city. Muhammad Shah was retained the emperor of the Mughal Empire. But his treasury was almost emptied. Among Nader Shah's booty included the famous Peacock Throne, the Koh-I-Noor and the Darya-ye-Noor diamonds.
5. All Mughal land west of the Indus were ceded to Nader Shah. The retreating Persian army also took with them thousands of horses, camels and elephants.
6. Nader Shah's devastating invasion weakened the already declining Mughal Empire. More importantly, it exposed the Mughal Empire's flaws and vulnerabilities and alerted the British East India Company to a possibility of expanding its horizons.