

Second Battle of Tarain

The second battle of Tarain was fought between the Ghurid army led by Muhammad Ghori and the Rajput Chahamanas and their allies led by Prithvi Raj Chauhan in 1192. The battle saw the defeat of the Rajputs, opening north India to future invasions and domination by Turkic tribes.

This article will give further details about the second battle of Tarain within the context of the IAS Exam.

Background of the second battle of Tarain

Following his defeat at the hands of Prithvi Raj Chauhan during the first battle of Tarain in 1191, Muhammad Ghori returned to Ghazni. He publicly shamed and dismissed the captains and commanders of his forces who showed cowardice at Tarain and took a vow to forego all luxuries until he avenged his defeat. Keeping this in mind he set about rebuilding his forces putting greater emphasis on firepower, mobility and discipline.

Prithvi Raj Chauhan meanwhile was elated at his victory at Tarain. Convinced that he had demonstrated the superiority of his forces, he neglected to strengthen his borders, although he did send proposals to neighbouring kingdoms in order to field a larger army should the Ghurids make a renewed attempt.

In the summer of 1192, Muhammad Ghori marched with an army of 52,000 cavalries, nearly half of the army of the Ghurid Army. When he reached Peshawar he decided it would be prudent to forgive his dismissed commanders and implored them to rejoin his army which they did.

Muhammad Ghori recaptured the fort at Bathinda when barely a month had passed since it fell to the Rajput forces. Once again Muhammad Ghori sent a demand to Prithvi Raj Chauhan to accept him as suzerain and just like last time it was refused. Prithvi Raj Chauhan marched out to meet Muhammad Ghori once again but the number of men he had raised for his army was below his expectation as he had sent his commanders campaigning elsewhere in the previous months.

Although contemporary sources exaggerate Prithvi Raj Chauhan's forces numbered 500,000 men and 3000 elephants, modern historians believed that 100,000 was the correct number with 300 elephants.

Facing each other once more on the fields of Tarain, Prithvi Raj Chauhan sent a message to Muhammad Ghori that he was willing to let the Ghurid king return to his homeland without a fight but should he continue his endeavour, he would destroy him. Utilising the concept of war as a deception, he pretended to agree to his terms, demanding that he retain Bathinda and

Multan while seeking time to consult with his brother who was co-ruler. Meanwhile, the Ghurid forces made preparations and carried out reconnaissance of the Rajput forces.

The ruse lured Prithvi Raj into a false sense of security in which he neglected to carry out scouting mission of his own. The Ghurid army marched out at the crack of dawn, carrying out a surprise raid in the Rajput camp in which several war elephants were neutralised.

Unused to such a kind of warfare as their military ethos forbade night-time battles, the Rajputs took time in recovering from their initial surprise until eventually repulsing the Ghurid cavalry attacking them. In their pursuit of the raiding force, the Rajputs found that the Ghurids had already arrayed themselves in battle formation. The second battle of Tarain was about to begin.

Events during the second battle of Tarain

Knowing the Rajput forces were well-disciplined, the Ghurids did not want to engage in melee combat with them. Instead, the Ghurids army was formed into five units, and four units were sent to attack the enemy flanks and rear.

As per historical sources, Muhammad Ghori directed a light cavalry force of 10,000 mounted archers, divided into four divisions, to surround the Rajput forces on the four sides. He instructed these soldiers not to engage in combat when the enemy advanced to attack, and instead feign retreat in order to exhaust the Rajput elephants, horses, and infantry.

In hopes of causing a break in the enemy lines, Muhammad Ghori ordered his fifth unit to feign a retreat. The Rajput forces charged the fleeing Ghurid unit, as the Ghurids expected. The Ghurids then sent a fresh cavalry unit of 12,000 and they managed to throw back the enemy advance. The remaining Ghurid forces then attacked and some of the Rajput troops fled in panic, while others stood their ground and fought to the last breath. The Ghurid forces had emerged victorious and Muhammad Ghori had avenged his defeat from the battle a year earlier.

The aftermath of the second battle of Tarain

As per various historical sources, it is stated that Prithvi Raj Chauhan was captured and summarily executed while other medieval sources state that Prithviraj was taken to his capital Ajmer, where Muhammad planned to reinstate him as a Ghurid vassal. Sometime later, Prithvi Raj Chauhan rebelled against Muhammad and was killed for 'treason'.

Whatever Prithvi Raj's Chauhan fate his kingdom fell to the Ghurid forces with relative ease eventually subjugating the entire Gangetic plain in less than a decade and reaching as far as Bengal.

The second battle of Tarain is significant among the Turkish and Arab invasions of India in the sense that though the Ghurid Kingdom would not last, the Islamic presence that it had brought

in its wake ensured that it would have a permanent base, influencing the cultural dynamics and history of the Indian subcontinent from that point on.