

Battle of Ghagra

The Battle of Ghaghra, fought in 1529, was a major battle for the conquest of India by the Mughal Empire. It followed the first Battle of Panipat in 1526 and the Battle of Khanwa in 1527.

It was fought between Mughal forces under Babur against the Sultanate of Bengal under Sultan Nusrat Shah.

This article will give details about the Battle of Ghaghra within the context of the IAS Exam.

Background of the Battle of Ghagra

Mahmud Lodi, brother of the erstwhile Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, had declared himself the rightful heir of the Delhi Sultanate following the death of his brother at the second Battle of Panipat in 1526.

His claim was however jeopardised following his defeat and flight at the Battle of Khanwa in 1527. Mahmud Lodi sought and received the help of his Afghan kinsmen in the east. His forces consisting of Eastern Afghan Confederates took Bihar.

The death of Sultan Mahmud Shah Lohani, the Pathan king of Bihar, his minor son Jalal ud-Din Lohani was placed on the throne. However, conflict arose between his mother Dudu and another noble Farid Khan, better known as Sher Shah Suri. The bitter infighting between the Lohani nobles distracted them from the oncoming armies of Babur, forcing the young prince to take refuge in the nearby sultanate of Bengal.

To prevent a total collapse of the state, the Afghans of Jaunpur invited Mahmud Lodi to ascend the throne of Bihar and Janpur. It was accepted and he managed to take over most of Bihar without opposition.

Upon receiving the news of developments in Bihar, Babur decided to march there with his army and reached the banks of the river Ganges at Dadaki on February 27, 1529 where he was met by his son Humayun and general Askari. Soon the entire Mughal army marched down the right bank of the river.

There he learnt that Sultan Mahmud Lodi was in the Bengal camp with a large host of Afghans. From his spies at the camp Babur learnt that Mahmud Lodi's request to remove their families from the frontlines was denied by the Bengalis who most likely wanted to keep a collateral in case Mahmud changed his mind.

Babur considered this behaviour offensive and their conduct shameful. As such their neutrality had been violated and it gave him *Casus Belli* (occasion for war) on the Bengalis.

Events during the Battle of Ghaghra

Babur found the army of Kherid, as the Bengal army was called, lying between what is at present the territory of Saran in the north. They set up camp on the left bank of the Ganges. He discovered too that the Bengali generals had collected about 100–150 vessels on their side of the stream by means of which they were able at once to hinder the passage of an enemy and to facilitate their own.

Babur was now joined by Sultan Junaid Birlas from Jaunpur with about 20,000 men.

The main body of the army under the command of Askari was ordered to march down the river in order to draw the enemy out of the camp. They were to distract the Bengali army long enough for a division under Babur and Muhammad Zaman to transport the artillery and musketmen across the river.

The plan worked and as such Babur was able to construct an artillery battery with which he rained down fire on the surrounded Bengali army. The Bengali army behaved with great bravery and pushed parties across to attack Babur's troops both above and below the junction of the rivers.

By the morning of May 6, 1529 as soon as Askari's army was making its move; Babur ordered his entire division and that of Zaman to cross without delay. The Afghans made several charges to prevent the river crossing but they were easily repulsed from withering small-arms and artillery fire. Soon they found themselves being slowly surrounded. On all three sides. Before the encirclement could be complete however, the Afghan commanders made the decision to retreat before their losses could mount and subsequently withdrew.

The Mughals had won.

Aftermath of the Battle of Ghagra

The victory had far reaching consequences. The battle ended Afghan hope for a kingdom of their own in the east and by proxy at Delhi. The feuds between the Lodi and Lohani factions were enough to destroy aspirations for an independent Afghan kingdom