

Battle of Assaye - [September 23, 1803]

The Battle of Assaye was fought between Maratha and British forces on 23 September 1803. The Maratha forces were defeated and this British victory was a decisive moment in the colonial subjugation of the Indian subcontinent. In this edition of This Day in History, you can read about this important event in modern Indian history for the [IAS exam](#).



Battle of Assaye Facts

- The Battle of Assaye was an important battle fought between the English and Maratha armies during the Second Anglo-Maratha War.
- It was fought at Assaye, a village in modern Maharashtra on 23 September 1803.
- The British forces were led by Major General Arthur Wellesley (younger brother of Richard Wellesley, Governor-General of Bengal).
- The Maratha forces were a combined army of Daulat Scindia and the Raja of Berar.
- The Maratha forces had larger numbers of infantry, cavalry and artillery. They also had European officers. The Maratha forces were commanded by Colonel Anthony Pohlmann, a German who was previously serving the British army. However, most of their soldiers were Pindaris (irregular horsemen accompanying the Maratha regular forces).

Background

- The Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao II was driven out of his capital Poona by his rivals, the Holkars of Indore.
- Baji Rao II sought refuge with the British who restored him to power at Poona in return for some territory and the stationing of British troops in Poona, in accordance with the Treaty of Bassein. This led to British control over the Peshwa and indirectly over the other Maratha chiefs.
- The other Maratha chiefs (Scindias and Bhonsales) objected to this and refused to accept the Treaty of Bassein. This led to the Second Anglo-Maratha War. The Holkars joined at a later stage against the British since they were reluctant to ally with the rival Scindias.

Result

- Despite being outnumbered, the British forces were successful in defeating the Marathas.
- Their young commander Arthur Wellesley showed remarkable intelligence and determination in subjugating the Maratha forces.
- It was a bloody battle with both sides suffering heavy casualties.
- The British lost about 1600 people and the Maratha forces lost close to 6000 men.
- In the words of Wellesley himself, this battle was *"the bloodiest for the numbers that I ever saw"*.
- The Maratha forces also showed tremendous grit and courage whilst fighting their enemies. Their gunners especially showed amazing brilliance on the battlefield.
- However, the Marathas did not have an able leader like Wellesley who could steer them in battle.
- Also, the Marathas themselves were not united.
- Only 1/4th of the Maratha camp were regular soldiers. Others were Pindaris (who did not get a regular salary but tagged along the Maratha infantry to have a share of the victor's loot).
- Also, the regular soldiers themselves were dissatisfied over their low and irregular pay, unlike the Company forces that were paid well.
- The Marathas with their larger force assumed that Wellesley would not attack them. When he did, they were taken by surprise.

Aftermath of the Battle

- This was a decisive battle in the Second Anglo-Maratha War which the British won ultimately. As a result, they won large parts of central India.
- This battle also shaped Wellesley's career and he went on to defeat Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. He was also the British Prime Minister for two terms.