

The Battle of Tarain

The Battles of Taraori often referred to as Tarain, took place in 1191 and resulted in Islamic rule in North India. Muizz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam of Ghor and Prithviraj III, the Chauhan Rajput ruler of Ajmer and Delhi, fought the battles. The battle was fought in Karnal and Thanesar in the Karnal region of modern-day Haryana, India, some 70 miles north of Delhi.

The First Battle of Tarain

In the first battle of Tarain, a Turkish clan led by Muhammad Ghori attacked the Rajputs led by Prithviraj Chauhan and his allies in the first battle of Tarain.

The First Battle of Tarain took place near Tarain in 1191, between the Ghurids against the Chahamanas and their allies (modern Taraori in Haryana, India). The Ghurid king Mu'izz al-Din was defeated by the king Prithviraj Chauhan, who avenged his defeat at the Second Battle of Tarain a year later.

Background

- Following the collapse of the Ghaznavid empire in the 12th century, several tribes fought for control of the empire, resulting in a power vacuum. Among these, the Ghurids won and, by 1149, had destroyed the ancient capital of Ghazni. The Ghurid empire was led by two brothers, Muhammad Ghori (also known as Mu'izz al-Din) and Ghiyas al-Din, who went on a strategy of expansion that included most of modern-day Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.
- They soon focused their attention on expanding their empire eastward into India. Northern India was a collection of loose-states at the time. The Chalukya dynasty in Gujarat, Jaichandra's Solanki dynasty in Kanauj, and Prithviraj Chauhan's Rajput Chahamanas in Ajmer and Delhi were among the most powerful. Muhammed Ghori sent an agent to Prithvi Raj Chauhan's court first in order to reach an agreement. Conversion to Islam and acceptance of the Ghurids' sovereign control were among the conditions. Prithvi Raj Chauhan turned down the offer.
- In 1178, Muhammad Ghori marched his army to the Chalukya kingdom, undeterred. He did so because the final remains of the Ghaznavids in Lahore and Multan were blocking the direct road to Delhi. After suffering massive casualties, the Ghurid army was destroyed by the Chalukya army and forced to escape. Muhammad Ghori, undaunted by losses, reinforced his armies and conquered the last remaining Ghaznavids when he captured Lahore in 1186. Muhammad Ghori now had a clear path to attack Prithvi Raj Chauhan's kingdom.

Events of the First Battle of Tarain

1. Muhammad Ghori marched his soldiers into India and proceeded to seize the major fort of Bathinda. The loss of Bathinda provoked a reaction from the Delhi army. Prithviraj Chauhan rallied his allies and led his army into battle against Muhammad Ghori.
2. The battle began with a probing attack by Ghurid archers, who scattered arrows across the Rajput formation. Prithvi Raj Chauhan instantly countered with an all-out attack that took the Ghurids off guard. They were unfamiliar to the Rajput style of combat, which favoured close combat.
3. The Ghurid army, to their credit, stood hard against waves of soldiers, but the Rajput cavalry began to overpower the Ghurid flank. Muhammad Ghori realised that the Rajputs benefited greatly from close-quarter fighting. Muhammad's forces broke ranks and fled, unable to sustain the pressure on their flank.

Aftermath of the First Battle of Tarain

The Ghurid raids into India did not finish there, as Muhammad Ghori was to return later, having learned his enemies' strengths and vulnerabilities and being cautious of overlooking his opponents in battle. As the second battle of Tarain would demonstrate, Prithvi Raj Chauhan's incapacity to pursue and slay his rival and consolidate his frontiers would have devastating consequences in Indian history.

The Second Battle of Tarain

In 1192, the Ghurid army led by Muhammad Ghori and the Rajput Chahamanas and their allies led by Prithvi Raj Chauhan fought the second battle of Tarain. The Rajputs were defeated in the fight, exposing north India to future invasions and Turkic tribe domination.

Background

- Muhammad Ghori returned to Ghazni after being defeated by Prithvi Raj Chauhan in the first battle of Tarain in 1191. He publicly humiliated and dismissed his armies' captains and commanders for their cowardice at Tarain, and vowed to refrain from all luxury until he avenged his defeat. Keeping this in mind, he began rebuilding his forces, focusing on firepower, mobility, and discipline.
- Meanwhile, Prithvi Raj Chauhan was overjoyed by his victory in Tarain. He neglected to strengthen his frontiers, believing that he had shown the supremacy of his soldiers, however he did send proposals to neighbouring kingdoms in order to deploy a larger army should the Ghurids make another effort.
- Muhammad Ghori marched with a force of 52,000 cavalry in the summer of 1192, roughly half of the Ghurid army. When he arrived in Peshawar, he felt that forgiving his dismissed commanders would be sensible, and he urged them to rejoin his army, which they did.

- After only a month, Muhammad Ghori recaptured the fort at Bathinda, which had surrendered to Rajput soldiers. Muhammad Ghori issued a demand to Prithvi Raj Chauhan to accept him as suzerain once more, but he was turned down.
- Prithvi Raj Chauhan marched out to meet Muhammad Ghori once more, but the amount of soldiers he had raised for his army fell short of his expectations, as he had sent his commanders on other battles in the previous months. Although ancient accounts claim that Prithvi Raj Chauhan's armies totaled 500,000 men and 3000 elephants, current historians agree that 100,000 men and three elephants was the correct figure.
- On the fields of Tarain, Prithvi Raj Chauhan sent Muhammad Ghori a message saying that he was willing to let the Ghurid king return to his homeland without a struggle with a battle, but that if he did not, he would destroy him. He claimed to agree to his requirements, demanding that he keep Bathinda.
- In the meantime, the Ghurid soldiers were preparing for battle and conducting inspection of the Rajput forces.
- The ruse misled Prithvi Raj into a false sense of security, leading him to skip his own scouting mission. The Ghurid army marched out before dawn, carrying out a surprise raid on the Rajput camp in which they were camped.
- The Rajputs took some time to recover from their first surprise, as their military philosophy outlawed night-time fights. Eventually, they defeated the Ghurid cavalry approaching them. The Rajputs discovered that the Ghurids had already formed a battle formation while pursuing the raiding army. Tarain's second battle was about to begin.

Events of the Second Battle of Tarain

The Ghurids did not want to engage in physical combat with the Rajput army since they knew they were well-trained. Instead, the Ghurid army was divided into five units, with four units attacking the enemy's flanks and rear. Ghori changed tactics and used a strategy that had been used by horse archers for centuries: a feigned retreat. The Rajput soldiers charged the supposedly fleeing battalion, as planned. The remaining Ghurid forces attacked immediately, and some Rajput men fled in terror, while others remained firm and battled till the last breath was taken.

Aftermath of the Second Battle of Tarain

Prithvi Raj Chauhan was captured and promptly executed, according to some historical sources, while other mediaeval records claim that Prithviraj was taken to Ajmer, where Muhammad planned to reinstate him as a Ghurid slave. The second battle of Tarain is significant among the Turkish and Arab invasions of India in that, while the Ghurid Kingdom did not last, the Islamic presence it left behind ensured that it would have a permanent base, influencing the cultural dynamics and history of the Indian subcontinent from then on.