

UNIT 56 – UPSC - The Second Anglo Maratha War

India's History : Modern India : The Second Anglo-Maratha war: The British defeat the Marathas at Assaye: Treaty of Amritsar : 1803 - 1805

The Second Battle



Although the defeat of Tipu left the Marathas as the chief rivals to Britain, the Second Maratha War arose initially from internal conflict within the Maratha Confederacy. The Peshwa, Bajirao II, was still the official head of the Marathas, but the most powerful were Daulat Rao Sindhia of Gwalior, and Jaswant Rao Holkar of Indore; lesser powers were the Gaekwar of Baroda and Ragoojee Bhonsla, Raja of Berar. Marquess Wellesley's attempts to bring these states into his 'subsidiary' system were unsuccessful, and civil war among the Marathas resulted in the utter defeat of the Peshwa's forces by Holkar at the battle of Poona (25 October 1802). Bajirao II fled to British protection, and by the Treaty of Bassein formed an alliance with the British, ceding territory for the maintenance of a subsidiary force, and agreeing to treat with no other power. This considerably extended British influence in western India, but Wellesley was still concerned over possible French interference, given the French influence in the Maratha forces, notably from Perron.



Marquess Wellesley determined to support the Peshwa, and Arthur Wellesley led a force, which re-installed Bajirao in Poona, without opposition, on 13 May 1803. By early August, negotiations with Sindhia having failed, the governor-general moved

against the two principal Maratha forces: a combined army of Sindhia and the Raja of Berar in the Deccan, about 50,000 strong, including 10,500 regular infantry; and further north, Sindhia's main army, about 35,000 strong, commanded by Perron. Marquess Wellesley formed two armies, the northern under General Gerard Lake, and the southern under Arthur Wellesley. Collaborating with the latter was the Hyderabad Contingent, some 9,400 strong, and in addition to Wellesley's own army, more than 11,000 strong were some 5,000-allied Mysore and Maratha light horse.

The British defeats the Marathas



On 6 August 1803 Arthur Wellesley received news of the failure of negotiations, and marched immediately upon the fortification of Ahmednagar. On 8 August he stormed and took the city, laid siege to Ahmednagar fort, and accepted its surrender on 12 August. This success had a profound effect upon the Maratha chieftain Gokhale, one of the Peshwa's supporters whose forces were present with Wellesley; he wrote that 'These English are a strange people and their General a wonderful man. They came here in the morning, looked at the pettah-wall, walked over it, killed all the garrison, and returned to breakfast.'

Wellesley encountered the army of Sindhia and Ragojee Bhonsla at Assaye on 23 September. The latter numbered between 40,000 and 50,000 men, including three brigades of regular infantry, the largest under the command of the ex-Hanoverian sergeant, Pohlmann. Despite the numbers, Wellesley determined to attack; as Colonel Stevenson's Hyderabad force was not within range of support, Wellesley had only some 7,000 men, of whom perhaps 500 had to guard his baggage, and of the remainder, he had only three European regiments (19th Light Dragoons, 74th Foot and 78th Foot). The Mysore and Maratha light horse, some believed to be of dubious loyalty, could not be used in the main action. Despite sustaining heavy casualties in their frontal attack, the small British and Company force won a considerable victory; it was Wellesley's first major success, and one which he always held in the highest estimation, even when compared to his later triumphant career. His losses, however, were severe, numbering nearly 650 Europeans and more than 900 Indian troops; from a strength of about 500 rank and file, the 74th lost ten officers and one volunteer killed and seven wounded, and 124 other ranks killed and 270 wounded, a casualty-rate of about three-quarters of those engaged. Having sustained such casualties, and

having fought the battle after a 24-mile march, Wellesley was unable immediately to pursue his defeated enemy, who had left 98 guns on the field, which they had bravely attempted to defend.

Wellesley pressed on in due course, until the Raja of Berar's army, with large numbers of Sindhia's cavalry made a stand at Argaum on 29 November 1803. They numbered probably between 30,000 and 40,000, Wellesley's army about 10-11,000, the European part being only the remains of those who had fought at Assaye, plus the 94th Scotch Brigade from Stevenson's force. The European infantry outpaced the rest as Wellesley ordered a frontal attack; the Marathas broke, abandoning 38 guns and Wellesley's cavalry did severe execution in the pursuit. Wellesley suffered barely 360 casualties in all. On 15 December 1803 a ferocious British assault captured the fortress of Gawilghur; the Raja of Berar sued for peace next day, and on 17 December ceded the province of Cuttack to the Company, and other territory to its allies.

Treaty of Amritsar



After the Treaty of Amritsar with British which simply stated that the International boundary of line between the Sarkar Khalsa and British India is Satluj. Ranjit Singh was virtually made master of all the territory to the west of Satluj. But.. there was several small kingdoms, like Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Kashmir, Multan, Sialkote which were ruled by Afghani or local chiefs.

Thus, Ranjit Singh first turned towards North towards Kangra valley which was taken over from Raja Sansar Chand by Gurkhas. Ranjit Singh's forces fought with Gurkhas in Kangra Valley in the end the Gurkha leader Amar Singh Thapa fled leaving the field to the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh entered the fort of Kangra and held a royal Darbar which

was attended by the hill chiefs of Chamba, nurpur, Kotla, Shahpur, Guler, Kahlur, Mandi, Suket and Kulu. Desa Singh Majithia was appointed governor of Kangra.

Then Ranjit singh sent a force under the command of Hukma Singh Chimmi to Jammu and himself marched on to Khushab. The fort of Khushab was held by Jaffar Khan, a Baluch chief. He gave up the city and defended the fort stoutly. Ranjit singh invited him to vacate the fort and accept a jagir. In few months, Jaffar Khan accepted Ranjit singh's terms and gave up the fort. He was given a jagir and allowed to remain in Khushab with his family.

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