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"INCONSISTENCE AND WARFARE A CASE STUDY OF PANIPAT 1761"

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ABSTRACT:

The third battle of panipat changed the routine equations of the victors and the defeated parties which in unique in the medieval history of India. Ahmed Shah Abdali, the victor of the third battle, could not gain the expected benefits. The defeated Marathas were accepted as the Managers of the Mughal Empire by the victor, Abdali Shah, who bestowed the Wazirship of the Mughal Empire on Ghazi-ud-din Khan, a protégé of the Marathas. He tried to conciliate the Peshwa Nana Sahib by sending condolence message couched in an apologetic tone and also by opening negotiations for political settlement.

KEYWORDS: medieval history, Mughal Empire, political settlement.

INTRODUCTION:

We learn from the elders that – Raghoba Dada carried the Maratha Standards to the Indus but the historical evidences reveal the fact that the Maratha Standards were carried beyond the River Indus by chasing Ahmad Shah Abdali's army, his Senapati Jahan Khan and Prince Taimur upto Peshawar in October 1758. The Marathas ruled a geographically and socially hostile place, Peshawar, for six months. The enthusiastic act of carrying the Maratha Standards beyond the Indus is the cause and consequence of Panipat 1761.

The plight of Senapati Jahan Khan and Prince Taimur at the hands of the Marathas and loss of territory was taken as an insult by Abdali Shah. Abdali Shah was invited by the Rohilla-leader of the Doab-Najib Khan and others, to drive out the Marathas to the south of river Narmada. Hence, he decided to take revenge. As the Maratha army in Peshwar was inadequate to face Abdali Shah, Tukoji Holkar and Sabaji Shinde retreated to Delhi and joined their master, Dattaji Shinde. Abdali-Shah entered Punjab in October 1759 and proceeded towards Delhi. The devoted sardar, Dattaji Shinde tried to protect Delhi from Abdali-Shah, but to the misfortune of Dattaji and the Marathas, he was hit by a bullet and his army was defeated at Barari Ghat on 10th January 1760 and Abdali Shah took possession of Delhi.

The news of Dattaji's death reached the Peshwa after 33 days on 13th February 1760. Which reflects the limitations of communications in those days. It is important to note that Nana Sahib became Peshwa at the age of 19, in 1740, and in 1760. At the age of 39, he was the prime protector of India. After hearing the news of Dattaji's death, Nana Sahib did not take a hasty unilateral decision. Consultations and discussions went on for one week. After the detailed discussions Sadashivrao Bhau the victor of Udgir and founder of modern artillery was the unanimous choice. Sadashivrao Bhau, son of Chimaji Appa, was the ablest and fittest man available in the Maratha Camp. Thus Bhausaheb, the Finance Minister (Dewan) cum Senapati was made the de-facto in-charge of the expedition to the North and Vishwasrao Peshwa's eldest son, was the de-jure-in-charge.

Bhauasaheb started from pater (near Jalna) on 14th March, 1760. He crossed the river Narmada on 16th April and the river Chambal on 15th July. On 25th July 1760 the advance guard on Bhauasaheb's army captured Delhi from Abdali Shah's army. The Marathas occupied Red Fort on 1st August 1760. Thus the Marathas regained their prestige in the North. At Delhi, Bhauasaheb proclaimed the wandering Prince, Ali Gouhar as the Emperor with the title Shah Alam II, on 10th October 1760. Abdali's puppet emperor, Shah Jahan II was politely asked to vacate his seat. This was perhaps the first time in the Mughal history when an emperor has been removed without violence to his person. A remarkable achievement of Bhauasaheb.

THE MARATHA TEMPERAMENT :

The Marathas by temperament were incapable of bigotry, fanaticism and treachery. They had taken up arms for the defence of their gods and homes in the 17th Century. They wielded with arms in the 18th Century for keeping India free from Foreign Rule. The battle of Panipat was not the exception. Sadashivrao Bhau fought for the principle "India for the Indians and governed by the Indians" Ahmadshah Abdali fought for the "Rule of Islam" and right of interference in Mughal empire.

THE EFFECT OF GEOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS.

The Maratha Army's capacity was greatly affected by unfavourable climate of the North. As shown in the map, there is considerable difference between the winter temperatures of the Punjab and that of the Deccan. The Marathas stayed at Panipat for 2½ months. (1st November to 14th January) during winter season with limited clothings, just sufficient for the Deccan winter. The Marathas used coats of cotton, while the Afghans and Pathans inspite of climate habitual to them, used thick wollen coats. Many Deccan horses and bullocks died at Panipat of unfavourable climate. Hence many Maratha cavalymen had to change into infantrymen overnight on the battle field.

The local population was also hostile to the Marathas in body-built-up, too, the Marathas were inferior to the Afghans and Rohillas. Bhauasaheb and Maratha army was inexperienced in crossing the big rivers in North India. On the other hand, Ahmadshah Abdali and his army was familiar and well experienced in crossing such rivers. Thus in comparison, Marathas were at a disadvantage. They were superior to their rivals only in respect of their ideals.

LOGISTICS

The predecessor of Bhauashab (Raghoba Dada) ignored difficulties in maintaining the logistics, which is clear from the map. For a ruler, it is essential to maintain a constant chain of transportation and communication. It is interesting to compare the distances between the Capitals or Strategic places. The distance between Pune and Ambala is 1600 Kilometers and the distance between Ambala and Peshwar is 800 Kilometers. Thus governing the area of 2400 Kilometers was impossible during those days. Even the mighty Moghuls could not establish their hold in the Puna Region. Prior to the Marathas, no political power was successful in ruling the region from Peshwar to Puna and hence, the Marathas failure was not the exception.

Delhi is located at equidistances (250 Kms) from Chambal and Sarhind. Gwalior is located to the south of the river Chambal. Thus, Delhi was nearer to Abdalishah stronghold Sarhind, than the Maratha's strong hold, Gwalior. Kunjpura, a strong fort and supply dept of Abdali-shah, was located at the centre, 125 kms. From Delhi and Sarhind. The Doab or the entire region to the north of Delhi was hostile to the Marathas while being favourable for the Afghans and the Rohillas.

Keeping these hurdles in mind, let me observe the chronology of events which led to the final combat at Panipat.

To check Ahmadshah Abdali's movements and supply of aids to him, Bhauasaheb decided to proceed towards the north. Bhauasaheb started from Delhi reached Panipat on 7th October 1760 and Kunjpura (Seemap) On 14th October 1760. Kunjpura guarded one of the most frequented roads from Punjab to Doab. With the assistance of modern artillery under Ibrahim Khan Gardi, the Marathas defeated Durrani & Rohilla and took possession of Kunjpura Fort. Ahmad Shah Abdali was the helpless and hopeless spectator on the opposite (East)

bank of the river Yamuna. Shah Abdali's lieutenants, Mian Qutb Shah and Abdus Samad Khan were captured alive and beheaded, which completed Dattaji's revenge.

GAINS OF BHAUSAHEB AT KUNJPURA

Bhausahab received seven lakh rupees in cash, five thousand horses, camels and elephants, ten thousand Khandis of wheat. Abdali Shah link to his capital (Kabul) was discontinued – a marvelous achievement of Bhausahab. To overcome the difficulties created by Bhausahab, Abdali Shah crossed the river Yamuna on 24th October 1760. Before Bhausahab could take any action, Abdali-Shah's army completed the crossing of the river, disconnection Bhausahab's contacts with south. At this critical juncture, Raghoba Dada and Sakhararam Bapu played the game of pulling Bhausahab's leg. Instead of providing threats from south to Abdali-Shah and cutting his supplies they sat idle at the Pune Court. On the opposite side, Ahmed-Shah Abdali had whole hearted support on Jajib-Khan and the Rohillas of Doab Bhausahab and Abdali-Shah expected their rivals to attack and prepared the plans accordingly. Both the armies remained face to face for 2½ months, from 1st November 1760 to 14th January 1761 in the Panipat vicinity.

LOCATION OF PANIPAT

Panipat is presently in Haryana, located to the west coast of Yamuna. It is 85 Kilometers north of Delhi. It is the part of Ganges plain, then known as Doab. It is the vast, continuous sandy plain gradually sloping from north to south. During the 18th century Panipat was located on the imperial road which connected Delhi to Peshwar. The local population was Muslim and hence hostile to Marathas. The Marathas allowed them to loiter and thus the local people acted as spies of Abdali-Shah. About 5 lakhs of people from both sides remained in that area which resulted in depletion of resources and creating the problem of air-pollution.

THE COMBAT

As stated earlier, Abdali-Shah's crossing of the river Yamuna changed Bhausahab's advantageous position. The Maratha army experienced the shortage of food in January. It was hunger which forced Bhausahab to attack Abdali-Shah on 14th January 1761. Prior to the actual fight it appears from the letters and preparations that the Marathas were confident of defeating Abdali-Shah. On the other hand Abdali-Shah was doubtful of Victory. Therefore he was prepared for both the eventualities. On the battle field, Bhausahab's plans were made futile by the superior General Abdali-Shah and the Marathas were defeated.

HISTORICAL OPINIONS OF THE EXPERTS

Major Evans Bell

The battle of Panipat was a triumph and glory for Marathas. They fought in the cause of "India for Indians" while the great Mohammedan Princes of Delhi, Oudh and the Deccan stood aside intriguing, And though the Marathas were defeated, the victorious Afghans retired and never again interfered in the affairs of India.

The following observations of the historians Madhavrao Pagadi and R. C. Majumdar, also highlight the Maratha supremacy during the 18th Century.

I) The British took the possession of more than half of India from the Marathas (i.e. Peshwa, Shinde, Holkar, Gaikwad And Bhosle.)

II) After the setback received at Panipat (1761) and the first Anglo-Maratha War (1774-82) Mahadaji Scindia became the King maker at Delhi and directed the imperial affairs till his death in 1794.

When I view the Maratha contributions in various spheres of National Life from the days of Chhatrapati Shivaji to this date, it reminds me of the prophetic words of Senapati Bapat.

"If Maharashtra is dead, the nation would no more.

The wheels of the Indian nation won't move without the help of the Marathas.

The real fighter is always an enemy of bonded life.

Maharashtra is the real support of India."

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