

Struggles of Ahmad Shah Durrani against Marathas and the Third Battle of Panipat

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Abstract

To understand a phenomenal event like struggles of Ahmad Shah Durrani against Marathas and Third Battle of Panipat, it is imperative to examine various and varying perceptions about it. The third battle of Panipat ranks as one of the significant events of 18th century and for more than two hundred and fifty years has fascinated countless generation. More precisely, this study explores objectives of Ahmad Shah Durrani's struggles against Marathas, which was to finish threats from Marathas to Durrani and Delhi Empires. Rallying his Afghan tribes and allies, he defeated Marathas and pushed them towards the east of India. Within few years, he re-occupied Lahore, Multan, Sindh, Kashmir and the Sarkar of Sirhind and again ruled over his conquered territories in India. This research is comprehensive in nature which is going to answer critical historical questions when it comes the efforts of Ahmad Shah Durani against Marathas in India. This study further highlights various perceptions and viewpoints regarding Durani and his rule in India.

Keywords: Ahmad Shah Durrani, Panipat, Najib-ud-Daulah, Malhar Rao Holkar, Sadashiv Rao.

1.1. Introduction

Ahmad Shah Durrani was the founder of the Durrani Empire and is regarded as the founder of the modern state of Afghanistan. He was son of Zaman Khan and grandson of Daulat Khan. He began his career by enlisting as a soldier in military of the Afsharid Kingdom and quickly rose to become a commander of Abdali and other Pashtun soldiers. After the assassination of Nadir Shah Afshar in 1747 AD, Ahmad Shah Durrani was elected as a king of Afghanistan. Rallying his Afghan tribes and allies, he marched towards east in the Mughal territories, west towards Persia, and north towards Khanate of Bukhara. He became the ruler of almost whole of the Punjab in 1752 AD. On the other side, Marathas who were straining and expanding their area of control towards the northwest of India. They succeeded in ousting Timur Shah and his court from India and brought northwest of India up to Peshawar under their rule. In 1759 AD, Durrani set out on his campaign to re-conquest lost territories. The early skirmishes ended in victory for the Afghans against the Maratha garrisons. The third Battle of Panipat fought in early 1761 AD between the Marathas and forces of the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani and his allies, was one of the biggest and most significant battles of the 18th century in India and has its impact for the next century and half. Though the Maratha Empire was the most powerful amongst all of their contemporary counterparts across India, they have

faced a huge defeat. The third battle of Panipat was a turning point in the history of not only India but also Afghanistan. The historians of Ahmad Shah Durrani have not paid adequate attention to his struggles against Marathas and the Third battle of Panipat. In the present article, an attempt has been made to discuss the struggles of Ahmad Shah Durrani against Marathas in detail.

1.2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For the purpose of having a background understanding about this study, various resources related to “*Struggles of Ahmad Shah Durrani against Marathas and the third battle of Panipat*” in Afghanistan and India were analyzed, which are as the following:

Ferrier (1858) in his book *History of the Afghans* mentioned that in 1761 AD, Durrani set out on his campaign to win back lost territories. The early skirmishes ended in victory for the Afghans against the Maratha garrisons in northwest India. By 1759 AD, Durrani and his army had reached Lahore and were poised to confront the Marathas. By 1760 AD, the Maratha groups had coalesced into a big enough army under the command of Sadashivrao Bhau. Once again, Panipat was the scene of a battle for control of northern India. The Third battle of Panipat was fought between Durrani's Afghan forces and the Maratha forces in January 1761 AD, and resulted in a decisive Durrani victory.

Sarkar (1934) in his book *Fall of the Mughal Empire* has given description about the result of the Third Battle of Panipat that Ahmad Shah Durrani had triumph. Beyond the booty that he carried away to enrich his people in Afghanistan, he derived no political gain from this grand and decisive victory.

Gupta (1944) in his work *Studies in Later Mughal History of the Panjab (1707-1793)* mentioned regarding the third battle of Panipat that Durrani's victory over the Marathas influenced the history of the subcontinent and, in particular, British policy in the region. His refusal to continue his campaigns deeper into India prevented a clash with the East India Company and allowed them to continue to acquire power and influence after they took complete control of the former Mughal province of Bengal in 1793.

Sardesai (1948) in his book *New History of the Marathas* has explained efforts of Ahmad Shah Durrani in India, that all his efforts were directed to annexing the adjoining rich country of the Punjab, securing the safety of its frontiers with a view to relieving the needs of his poor country. It was with this object in view that he wished to have on the throne of Delhi a person friendly to himself.

Ganda Singh (1959) in his book *Ahmad Shah Durrani, Father of Modern Afghanistan*, mentioned that not only Muslims but even Hindu Ranas, Madho Singh of Jaipur and Bijay Singh of Marwar invited Ahmad Shah Durrani for the protection of their territories from the inroads of the Marathas.

Ghubar (1998) an Afghan historian in his book named “*Ahmad Shah Baba Afghan*” that one great effect of the unambitious policy of Ahmad Shah Durrani towards the throne of India was paving the way for the British expansion to the north-west, to Delhi and ultimately to Punjab and the Afghan frontier beyond the Khyber hills.

Roy (2004) in her book *India's Historic Battles: From Alexander the Great to Kargil*, explained that Durrani sacked the Mughal capital and withdrew with the booty he coveted. To counter the Afghans, Peshwa Balaji Bajirao sent Raghunath Rao. Raghunath Rao succeeded in ousting Timur Shah and his court from India and brought northwest of India up to Peshawar under Maratha rule.

Atae (2015) an Afghan historian mentioned in his book "*A Brief Look on Contemporary History of Afghanistan*", that Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1760 AD defeated Marathas at Barari Ghat, Rewari, Sikandarabad, Sonapat and then he arrived to Panipat on 1st November. On 14th January 1761 AD, the bloody battle of Panipat occurred in which the Marathas were defeated by Afghans."

1.3. GAPS AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF THE STUDY

There is a general impression among the historians regarding the struggles of Ahmad Shah Durrani against Marathas and the third battle of Panipat. They are of the opinion that his struggles against Marathas and the third battle of Panipat paved the way for the British expansion to the north-west, to Delhi and ultimately to Punjab and the Afghan frontier beyond the Khyber hills and he derived no political gain from his grand and decisive struggles. But, the kind of evidences we have from other historians, indicate a different story. He was invited by Indian Muslims to fight Marathas and to protect them and their territories from the inroads of the Marathas. Not only Muslims but even Hindu Ranas, Madho Singh of Jaipur and Bijay Singh of Marwar invited Ahmad Shah Durrani for the protection of their territories from the inroads of the Marathas. Also, his efforts were directed to re-occupying his lost territories and securing the safety of its frontiers. The given information is not sufficient to solve the issue. Thus, study will provide more information regarding his struggles against the Marathas and the third battle of Panipat.

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research indicates the fact of Ahmad Shah Durrani's struggles against Marathas and the third battle of Panipat and clear assorted misconceptions about his struggles. Moreover, this research helps the students of history to distinguish about the reality of Ahmad Shah Durrani's struggles against the Marathas and the third Battle of Panipat. Besides this, the research opens a new chapter in the History of Afghanistan and India.

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To indicate the main reasons of the third Battle of Panipat.
2. To understand how Ahmad Shah Durrani did deal with Marathas in India.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What were the results of the Third Battle of Panipat?
2. How did Ahmad Shah Durrani deal with Marathas in India?

1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the light of the purposes and theoretical frameworks of the research, this study is designed to employ a qualitative research method in order to help interpret or explain the results gained from various sources. In this research, the researcher used library research data collection method, and the data was collected from various books and articles through first hand resources.

1.8. Struggles of Ahmad Shah Durrani against Marathas and the Third Battle of Panipat

1.8.1. Adina Beg Khan invited the Marathas

In order to bring various Afghan districts into one political unit, Ahmad Shah Durrani started expeditions in 1747 AD and Within a few years, he occupied Lahore, Multan, Sindh, Kashmir and the sarkar of Sirhind and ruled over his conquered territories in India. In 1757 he installed his son Timur Shah as the Viceroy of Punjab with Jahan Khan as his deputy. (Ganda Singh, 1959) Timur Shah established peace and order in Punjab and appointed Adina Beg Khan as the *faujdar* of Jullundur in lieu of thirty-six lakhs of rupees annually. But Soon after Adina Beg Khan, opposed of Timur Shah and Jahan Khan and he opened negotiation with the Marathas¹ and the Sikhs. Early in 1758 AD Adina Beg Khan sent his envoys, Har Lal and Sidiq Beg to Raghunath Rao and invited the Marathas to the Punjab. He offered to pay one lakh of rupees per day when they were marching, and fifty thousand when halting. Raghunath Rao readily accepted the offer and marched toward Punjab in the beginning of March, 1758 AD. The Marathas arrived in neighborhood of Sirhind on March 9, where Adina Beg and his Sikh allies also joined them. Sirhind fell after a short resistance on the part of Abdul Samad Khan, the governor of the place. Sirhind was plundered by Marathas, Abdul Samad Khan, Jangbaz Khan and some other Afghans were taken by them. (Cunningham, 1955)

1.8.2. Marathas in the Punjab

The combined forces of the Marathas, Adina Beg Khan and the Sikhs arrived in the neighborhood of Lahore. It became impossible for Timor Shah and Jahan Khan to stay in Lahore. Their troops were only a few thousand and there was no hope of reinforcement from Ahmad Shah Durrani, who was himself busy with the affairs of the state at home. Therefore, they evacuated the capital on 9th April, and retired to Afghanistan. Marathas occupied Punjab and advanced as far as Attock, which was held by them in actual occupation for about four months. Subsequently, they appeared to have crossed the Indus and stationed themselves at least for a time at Peshawar. (Ghubar, 1998)

¹ After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 AD, the 27 years' war ended in Maratha victory. This was followed by the phase of rapid expansion of the Maratha Empire for the next 50 years under patronage of Shahu and his appointed Peshwas Baji Rao I and Balaji Baji Rao. They conquered Gujarat, the whole of Central India and Orissa, subdued Rajputanan, and raided into Bengal and Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu, and imposed chauth upon those arias. Their ambition pushed them further northward. Balaji Rao Peshwa's brother, Raghunath Rao, was stationed in the neighborhood of Delhi with a vast army. He had arrived there with Malhar Rao Holkar in August 1757 AD, and had since driven out Najib-ud-Daulah from Delhi and Saharanpur. (Ganda Singh, 1959).

Raghunath Rao, the commander of expeditionary force, stayed in Lahore for less than a month. He appointed Adina Beg Khan as a governor of Punjab for an annual tribute of seventy-five lakhs of rupees. Adina Beg Khan, in turn appointed Khwaja Mirza Jan Khan as his *naib*, fixing his headquarters in the Doaba Bist Jullundur as usual. But soon after, Adina Beg Khan died on 15th September, 1758 AD. His death threw Punjab into turmoil and there was chaos and anarchy everywhere. Khawja Mirza Jan who was now the Maratha governor of Punjab could not cope with the situation. At this time, Antaji Manakeshwar and some other Maratha Sardars arrived near Delhi. Antaji stayed in Delhi, while his companions, Tukoji Holkar and Narsoji Pandit marched to Lahore. They arrived at Lahore, and then marched towards north-west, crossed the Indus and occupied Peshawar. About the middle of November 1758 AD, they returned back at the call of Mirza Jan Khan to safeguard his position. Towards the end of December 1758 AD, Rughunath Rao and Malhar Rao Holkar were returning to the Deccan from Delhi. Peshwa gave supreme command of north India to Dattaji Sindhia, while Jankoji Sindhia was appointed his deputy. (Farhang, 2010)

1.8.3. Mughal Emperor Alamgir Sani, Najib-ud-Daulah and other Indian nobles invited Ahmad Shah Durrani to march India

After peace treaty with Naseer Khan Baluch, Ahmad Shah Durrani went to Kandahar, and decided to punish Marathas by marching to India and re-establish his dominions which had been lost by escape of Timur Shah and Jahan Khan. At the same time, he received number of petitions from Indians. Such as, Najib-ud-Daulah Ruhila, his representative in India who was hard pressed by Marathas and expelled from Delhi in September 1757 AD; he was besieged in Sukkartal². Najib-ud-Daulah wrote to his master: "All this misery has been inflicted by the infidel Marathas on our people; you are the Emperor of Muslim; it is your duty to remedy this affair". Meanwhile, Najib-ud-Daulah won over most of the Indian Muslim nobles, took written undertakings from them and forwarded all such letters to Ahmad Shah Durrani. Then a letter was dispatched by the Mughal Emperor, Alamgir Sani, in which he had written that: "Imad-ul-Mulk Ghazi-ud-Din is thinking of killing me. If your majesty come this side, I may be saved from the hand of this tyrant; otherwise, there is no possibility of safety either of me or of my sons". (Gupta, 1944). According to Ganda Singh, even Hindu Ranas, Madho Singh of Jaipur and Bijay Singh of Marwar invited Ahmad Shah Durrani for the protection of their territories from the inroads of the Marathas. (Ganda Singh, 1959).

1.8.4. Occupation of Lahore

Ahmad Shah Durrani dispatched Sardar Jahan Khan in advance and then he himself left Kandahar for India through the Bolan Pass, early in autumn of 1759 AD. The Shah crossed the Indus on the 25th October 1759 AD and entered Punjab. At the same time, Jahan Khan had pushed Maratha chief, Sabaji out of Attock; Sabaji fled away towards Delhi without stopping at Lahore, Batala, Jullundur or Sirhind. Another calamity befell the Marathas on the bank of the Satluj, where they were pounced upon by villagers of Doaba Bist Jullundur. Some of the Marathas had crossed over to the southern bank, while others were still on the north side when they were taken by surprise. Four thousand camels, gold and about a thousand horses were

² Sukkartal is a small fort and village in the Nuzaffarnagar district of U.P., about half a mile from the right bank of the Gages. (Gupta, 1944).

carried away. In addition to this, a general and several soldiers of the Marathas, who had lagged behind near Lahore, were overtaken and cut off by the Afghan vanguard.

One corps of six thousand Maratha horse and foot posted in Multan, however, retreated to the east of Lahore without any loss. On the arrival of Shah in the neighborhood of Lahore, a great battle was fought with the Sikhs, the Sikhs lost the battle and Shah entered Lahore. Ahmad Shah Durrani appointed Haji Karimdad Khan, nephew of Wazir Shah Wali Khan, as governor of Lahore with Amir Khan as his deputy. Zain Khan was appointed *faujdar* Chahar mahal. After that, Ahmad Shah Durrani sent Jahan Khan in advance towards Sirhind with fifteen thousand men; he himself followed him at a slow pace. On December 10, 1759 AD the Ahmad Shah Durrani encamped at Khizarabad, in the *pargannah* of Ropar, from where he moved on to Sirhind. When the news about Ahmad Shah's march reached Delhi, the Delhi *Wazir* Imad-ul-Mulk Ghazi-ud-Din, fearing that Emperor Alamgir Sani and Khan-i-Khanan Intizam-ud-Daulah would join Ahmad Shah Durrani against him, murdered both of them on 29th and 30th November respectively. He placed on the throne another prince under the title of Shah Jahan Sani. These murders infuriated Ahmad Shah against the traitor, Ghazi-ud-Din. (Ganda Singh, 1959).

1.8.5. Marathas were defeated at Taraori and Barari-Ghat

Dattaji Sindhia who had besieged Najib-ud-Daulah at Sukkartal raised the siege on 8th December 1759 AD and prepared himself to meet Ahmad Shah Durrani. He crossed the river Jamuna at Ramra-Ghat near Panipat on 20th December 1759 AD. Dattaji marched from Kunjpura in the direction of advanced guard of Ahmad Shah Durrani under the command of Sardar Jahan Khan. The advanced guard of the Marathas under Bhoite came to a sharp engagement on the 24th December near the plain of Taraori in which the Marathas were defeated. Bhoite was driven back with a loss of 400 lives. Ahmad Shah Durrani crossed the Jumna at night at Buriya Ghat and entered the Doab where Najib-ud-Daulah joined him at Saharanpur; they now marched to Delhi. Within a few days, other Ruhila Afghan Sardars of India, like Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Donda Khan, Saadullah Khan, Faizullah Khan, Fateh Khan and Mulla Sardar Khan Bakhshi also joined Ahmad Shah Durrani. On his arrival in the neighborhood of Delhi, Ahmad Shah Durrani fixed his camp at Luni, six miles to the north-east of Delhi (Gupta, 1944).

After his defeat at Taraori, Dattaji moved towards Delhi and reached Barari Ghat on the Jamuna, 10 miles north of Delhi, on 4th of January 1760 AD. The eastern bank of the Jamuna being completely in the hands of Durrani and his allies, no information regarding his activities could filter down to the western bank occupied by the Marathas. Early in the morning of the 9th of January, 1760 AD, Najib-ud-Dualah and his Ruhilas began crossing the river and appeared on a small island formed by the parting channels of the river. Najib Khan's rear was covered by the Durrani's. Sabaji, who was holding the Barari-Ghat, moved out to oppose them, but he was defeated by them. Then Dattaji Sindhia rushed to the battle field with reinforcements to retrieve the losing position. But he was also defeated by Najib-ud-Dualah and Afghans. Dattaji was killed and the Marathas were completely routed (Ganda Singh, 1959).

1.8.6. State of affairs at Delhi and proceed against Suraj Mal

Meanwhile, after the victory of the battle of Barari-ghat, Ahmad Shah Durrani halted at Luni for a few days to complete his arrangements for the state affairs at Delhi. Hearing defeat of the Marathas, near the plain of Taraori, Ghazi-ud-Din left Delhi and fled to Suraj Mall Jat's fort of Kumhir. Ahmad Shah Durrani allowed the new Emperor (Shah Jahan Sani) to continue in the fort of Delhi and appointed Yaqub Ali Khan Bamizai, the governor of Delhi³ (Ganda Singh, 1959).

After the settlement of the affairs of Delhi, Ahmad Shah Durrani encamped at Khzirabad, south of the capital on 14th January 1760 AD, and sent off letters to Suraj Mal Jat and the Rajput Rajas, Madho Singh of Jaipur and Bijay Singh of Marwar, who had invited him to India, to pay him tribute and to present themselves before him. But, when Ahmad Shah Durrani did not receive satisfactory reply from Suraj Mall, he left Khizarabad on 27th of January 1760 AD and marched into the Jat territory via Shergarh and arrived at Dig on the 6th of February. The fort was invested on the following morning but not very earnestly. At the same time, the Marathas decided to harass the enemy (Afghans) by guerilla warfare. In this case, while Ahmad Shah Durrani was encamped in front of Dig, a detachment of the Marathas advanced from the direction of Rewari. Ahmad Shah Durrani sent a strong detachment of the Afghans against them. The Marathas were defeated by night-attack on the 11th of February. Meanwhile, Ahmad Shah Durrani received the news that Marathas under Jankoji, who had fled from Barari Ghat to the south-west and gathered at Kot Putli, were joined by Malhar Rao from Rajputana. Ahmad Shah Durrani raised the siege of Dig and marched out to meet and defeat them, before they were reinforced by more troops from the Deccan. But the Marathas under Malhar Rao Holker quietly disappeared in the northern desert to reappear at Bahadurgarh on the 22th of February. Ahmad Shah Durrani then marched towards Delhi, evidently, to intercept Malhar Rao Holker before he could take Delhi. On 29th of February 1760 AD, Shah reached Khizarabad and sent Jahan Khan across the eastern bank of the Jamuna the next day (Sarkar, 1934).

1.8.7. Malhar Holkar routed near Sikandarabad by Jahan Khan

The Maratha raiders under Malhar Rao Holker reached Sikandarabad on 28th February, sacked that large city totally, and halted for the news of Durrani's movements. At this time, a treasure of ten lakhs of rupees sent from Najib-ud-Daulah's estates in east Ganges had arrived opposite Anupshahar on the way to Durrani's camp. Meanwhile Malhar Rao Holkar came to know about the treasure; he immediately sent out scouts to search for a ford near Anupshahar to cross the Ganges and halted for three or four days. It was feared lest this treasure should fall into the hands of the Marathas, Ahmad Shah Durrani ordered Shah Pasand Khan, Qalandar Khan and Jahan Khan to hasten to Sikandarabad with a force of fifteen thousand, fling a surprise upon the Marathas and drive them away before they had crossed to the east of the Ganges and succeeded in devastating the territories of the Ruhila allies of Ahmad Shah Durrani. The Afghan commanders crossed the Jamuna and fell upon the advanced position of Malhar Rao Holkar held by Gangadhar Yashwant Tatya at a distance of about eight miles from the main

³ It was rumored at this time that Ahmad Shah had placed his own son on the throne of Delhi. But it had never been the intention of the Afghan King to take possession of the throne of India either for himself or for his son. (Zamani, 2013)

camp on the 4th March. The Maratha detachment could not stand against the Afghans and Ruhilas and after a short resistance, they fled away; many of them fell in the flight pursuit. Among those killed on the field were three high Maratha officers, Anand Ram, Shetaji Kharade and his son Faqirji Kharade. Their rout was so precipitate that many of them rode off on unsaddled horses. Malhar Rao Holkar, instead of coming to help his subordinate officer, fled towards Agra after crossing Jamuna, while Gangadhar Tatyia retired to Mathura (Sarkar, 1934).

This disaster befell the Marathas on the 4th of March 1760 AD, and had a very depressing effect on them. Writing from Jhansi on 13-14th March 1760 AD, to the Peshwa Balaji Rao, Raja Keshav Rao sounded a note of despair, ‘shortly, the Abdali (Ahmad Shah Durrani) and Ruhilas have all joined together. They have a large army and enormous quantities of artillery ammunition. It is not possible to fight with them properly. We cannot lay our hands on them. Using dilatory tactics, we are eagerly looking in the direction of the Deccan for reinforcements. If any such help is coming, all will unite and defeat the enemy. Najib Khan Ruhila and all other tribes of the Ruhilas from the districts of Muradabad and Bareilly have become one and joined the Abdali. It is said that more army is coming to Ahmad Shah Durrani from Kabul. If anyone from your family is coming up, kindly send some European guns and ammunition along with him. The Jats, Madho Singh and Shuja-ud-Daulah are all afraid of the enemy. (A warrior like) Dattaji Shinde was reduced to such a plight (as to be killed by the Afghans). Hence, the Abdali and the Ruhilas are very proud. Secondly, our army also cannot hold its own against them. Malhar Rao is trying to harass them by his tricks. But the Abdalis and the Ruhilas are not like (India) Mughals. They are ferocious warriors, strong in attacking as well as in fighting. The empire of the Mughals in Delhi has been rendered powerless (by them), practically, the Mughal rule has come to an end’. The light foray plan of campaign even under Malhar Rao Holkar, the ablest cavalry leader among the Marathas, had entirely failed against Abdalis’ (Ganda Singh, 1959).

1.8.8. Marathas occupied Delhi and placed Shah Alam Sani on the Throne

The Peshwa was not disheartened at the defeat of Dattaji Sindhia and Malhar Rao Holkar. He sent a large army from the Deccan under the nominal command of his son Vishwas Rao. The actual control, however, was given to Sadashiv Bhau (nephew of Baji Rao 1). He also had the assistance of a Muslim officer, Ibrahim Khan Gardi. The Maratha army under Sadashiv Bhau arrived at Gwalior on the 30th of May and then crossed the river Chambal on the 8th June. It was on the northern bank of the Chambal that Malhar Rao Holkar and Suraj Mall Jat joined him. A little afterwards, he reached the bank of the river Ghambir to the south of Agra. He ardently desired to cross the Jumna to get at the Durrani, but could not easily cross the Ghambir, a little stream which had been flooded by early rains. Therefore, he decided to seize Delhi and dispatched a strong force under Malhar Rao Holkar, Jankoji Shinde and Balwant Ganesh Mahendele, guided by Ghazi-ud-Din and Suraj Mall Jat. Yaqub Ali Khan used all his efforts to resist the Marathas but he failed because there was no hope of any support from Ahmad Shah Durrani due to heavy rains. Delhi fell into the hands of the Marathas on 22nd of July. (Gupta, 1944).

The capital of the Mughal Empire yielded no booty to the Maratha conqueror. It had already been drained of its wealth by Nadir Shah and Wazir Ghazi-ud-Din. Sadashiv was in

urgent need of money. His soldiers had not been paid for a long time. They were reduced to starvation at Delhi. Therefore, Sadashiv Bhau ordered the remaining silver ceiling of Diwan-i-Khas to be removed and converted into coins. But this was not enough. In the meantime, he left Naro Shankar in charge of Delhi, and he himself moved out of the city on the 12th of August and encamped near Badli. He stayed there for two months and then left his camp and arrived Kunjpura which was defended by Sardar Abdul Samad Khan Muhammadzai, Ahmad Shah Durrani's governor of Sirhind, and Mian Qutab Shah. The defenders were overpowered by the Marathas. Abdul Samad Khan got killed on the field, while Mian Qutab Shah was wounded. Much booty was acquired from the fort. The city was plundered and the soldiers and the camp-followers looted the houses of people to their heart's content. (Ganda Singh, 1959).

Sadashiv Bhau while marching from his camp near Badli to Kunjpura, had deputed two of his trusted officers, Nana Purandare and Appaji Jadav Rao to Delhi and instructed them to depose the puppet emperor Shah Jahan Sani and proclaim Shah Alam Sani in his place. This was done on the 10th of October; Mirza Jawan Bakht, the eldest son of the Emperor Shah Alam Sani was appointed as his *naib*. The office of *Wazir* (prime minister) was conferred on Shujah-ud-Daulah in the hope of winning him over to Marathas' side. (Ganda Singh, 1959).

1.8.9. The Battle of Panipat (January 14, 1761 AD)

The loss of Delhi and Kunjpura was too much for Ahmad Shah Durrani. The sake of Kunjpura and the plunder of his supplies exhausted the patience of Ahmad Shah Durrani. He sent out men in search of fords and moved northward on the 20th of October. When a ford was discovered near Baghpat, he ordered his army to march under the guidance of Shuja-ud-Daulah to the passage of Baghpat on the 25th of October. Ahmad Shah Durrani himself crossed it on the 26th, and by the evening of the next day the Afghan army was on the western bank. (Gupta, 1944). Sadashiv had, in the meantime, moved away from Kunjpura in the direction of Kurukshetra for a religious bath. He had posted a patrol near Sonapat. But they were surprised by Shah Pasand Khan, who put them to the sword on the 27th October 1760 AD. When Sadashiv came to know that Ahmad Shah Durrani crossed Jamuna, he immediately wheeled back towards Panipat, as he wanted to meet Ahmad Shah Durrani there. Sadashiv reached there on the 29th of October and placed his army on the North side of Panipat. Marathas arranged a group of advance armies of about 25,000 men and dispatched it near Sarai Sambhalka. They were defeated by the Afghans under Shah Passand Khan. Ahmad Shah Durrani arrived at Panipat on 1st of November and took up a position at a distance of about five miles from Maratha camp. The opponents lay here encamped for a period of two and half months and frequent skirmishes took place between them. A large number of troops were killed on both sides. The Maratha commander Balwant Rao Mehendele who was the most trusted lieutenant of Sadashiv Rao was also killed during this time. (Ganda Singh, 1959).

1.8.9.1. The Marathas blockaded by Ahmad Shah Durrani

Ahmad Shah Durrani decided upon blockading the Marathas. Every night a body of 5,000 troops advanced as far as they could in safety towards the enemy camp. They cut off all those ways which could help the Marathas' camp in Panipat. The southward road to Delhi was the first to be closed by reason of the Afghan army sitting astride it. The Kunjpura grain-stores had, in the meantime, been captured by Diler Khan Ruhila. Sadashiv Bhau paid high wages to

*Banjaras*⁴, they brought supplies from Delhi during the night by some obscure path, but on account of strict vigilance of the enemy, this method was also stopped. The only hope of the Marathas then lay in Sardar Ala Singh of Patiala who came to their help at this critical moment and supplied them with provisions from the northwest. Ahmad Shah Durrani sent an expedition into Ala Singh's territory and closed this way as well. Consequently, there was a great scarcity of provisions and forage in the Maratha camp (Gupta, 1944).

1.8.9.2. Govind Ballal surprised by Afghans

In retaliation, Sadashiv ordered Govind Ballal to devastate the territory of the Rohilla chiefs in the Gangetic Doab, and thus starve Ahmad Shah Durrani by cutting off his supplies. He marched with nearly 10,000 horses, came as far as Meerut and stopped all supplies to the Durrani. It was feared lest this move of the enemy should spread the consternation among Ahmad Shah's Ruhila allies and cause some desertions. Ahmad Shah Durrani, therefore, sent a fresh force of five thousand horses under the command of Haji Atai Khan and Karimdad Khan to march against Govind Ballal.⁵ Crossing the Jamuna near Baghpat, they swooped down upon Shahdara near Delhi and cut down the Maratha outpost in the evening of 16th of December. The next morning, they annihilated corps at Ghaziabad and then sprang a surprise upon Govind Ballal at Jalalabad. The Marathas fled away, Govind Ballal was shot to death. Vast quantities of grain and other stores fell into the hands of the Afghans and the fear of the supplies from the Ruhila territories being cut off was removed (Ganda Singh, 1959).

1.8.9.3. Sadashiv Decided to Fight

When Ahmad Shah Durrani cut off the Maratha provisions from all sides, Sadashiv Rao decided to launch an attack upon the Afghans early morning on 14th of January, 1761 AD and ordered his officers to prepare themselves for struggle. He commanded the centre himself, with Ibrahim Khan Gardi on his left, while the right wing was held by Malhar Rao Holkar and Jankoji Shinde. On the other hand, Ahmad Shah Durrani placed over half (18000) of his own national troops in the centre in charge of his *wazir*, while the two other corps about five thousand each, were sent to extreme right and left. Thus, his Indo-Muslim allies were wedged in between strong bodies of Durrani troops on both sides and any attempt at treachery or flight on their part could be promptly crushed. Najib-ud-Daulah and Shuja-ud-Daulah were sent to the left, commanded by Shah Pasand Khan, while Hafiz Rahmat Khan and Dunde Khan were placed in the right wing. (Sarkar, 1934)

The total number of Maratha army in the battle of Panipat was 45,000 and Afghans were 60,000 (Ganda Singh, 1959). But according to other historians, the number of army on both sides was different from what Ganda Singh has quoted, such as: J.P. Ferrier in his book, *History of the Afghans* has mentioned that the effective force of Ahmad Shah's army was 85,000 men, 45,000 being cavalry and the remainder infantry. And the Maratha army was not more than from 100,000 to 110,000 troops (Ferrier, 1858). According to James Grant Duff, the Muhammadan force consisted of 41,800 horse, 38,000 foot, and about 70 pieces of cannon and the Marathas have been reckoned at 55,000 horse and 15,000 foot, with 200 pieces of cannon

⁴ The grain, salt and grass carriers on bullocks were called Banjaras.

⁵ Hari Ram Gupta specified in his book: The number of Maratha army as 12,000 and Afghans as 14,000 (Gupta, 1944).

(Duff, 1878). Mohammad Ibrahim Attaee, Afghan historian said, ‘The number of Maratha army in the battle of Panipat was 300,000 and Afghans were 60,000’. (Attaee, 2015). Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar writes in his book that in the battle of Panipat, the number of Maratha troops were 340,000, while Afghans were only 60,000. (Ghubar, 1998) Professor Khir Muhammad Zamane, an Afghan Historian has said, ‘in the battle of Panipat, the number of Marathas and their allies (Rajputs, Jats and British) were (300-500) thousands and Afghans were 60,000’. (Zamani, 2013)

1.8.9.4. 14th January and beginning of the Battle

The battle began with the attack of Ibrahim Gardi from the left wing of Maratha. He ordered two of his battalions to hold the Afghans under Brakhurdar Khan and himself with other seven battalions fell straight upon the forces of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Dondi Khan and Ahmad Shah Durrani. The struggle was desperate and at first it appeared as if Gardi would push the enemy back in rout. But he soon lost his superiority in a breast-to-breast fighting. Then reinforcement came from Ahmad Shah Durrani and the battalions of Gardi were overpowered and annihilated. Damaji Gaikwad came to the support of Ibrahim Gardi but he was outnumbered. The Marathas could not hold their own against the Afghans and Ruhilas and took to flight. At the end, the left wing of the Maratha army was routed entirely (Sarkar, 1934).

Simultaneously, with the attack of Ibrahim Gardi on the Right wing of the Afghans, Sadashiv Rao Bhau attacked the Afghan Centre under Shah Wali Khan. There was exchange of fire from both sides. Then in an instant, Sadashiv’s men desperately rushed upon the Durrani of Shah Wali Khan and pierced through the front skirmishers. There was confusion in the Afghan ranks and some of Haji Atai Khan’s men gave way. Shujah-ud-Daulah could not come to the support of the shaking Centre, because it would weaken his left wing, opposed to Jankoji Shinde and Malhar Rao Holkar. However, in the absence of a strong cavalry squadron, which could charge the confused Afghans and put them to flight, Sadashiv Rao Bhau could not make the best use of his advantageous position. In the meantime, the Shah’s officers rallied behind the retreating Afghans, collected all available troops from the camp, added to them a detachment of Shah’s bodyguards and pushed them to the support of Shah Wali Khan. These fresh troops turned the tables upon the Marathas who were thrown off their feet and pushed back. At this critical moment, Vishwas Rao, the Peshwa’s son and the nominal commander-in-Chief of the force, rushed into the thick of the fight. But this made no appreciable impression upon the Afghans who were further reinforced by Ahmad Shah Durrani with three fresh squadrons of slaves. Under instructions from their master, they displayed peculiar tactics. They enveloped the Marathas from three sides. One squadron came from the right, discharged their muskets at the enemy and went away to the left, while the second rushed from the left, fired at the Marathas and hurriedly moved on to the right. The third squadron advanced from the front, poured fire into the vanguard and then wheeled to the rear. These movements left no time for the enemy to compose themselves. Before they could do so, these squadrons had loaded their pieces and returned to repeat the same thing again. With all this, the Marathas made three attacks upon the Centre wing of Shah Wali Khan. But his men had regained their position and stood firm like a rock. Around two o’clock, Vishwas Rao was shot dead by bullet. This was a very great shock to Sadashiv Roa. He collected his personal followers, gathered as many of

other troopers as he could and then led a last desperate attack upon the Afghans. He received a spear wound and was thrown off his horse by a bullet in the thigh and was killed. However, Malhar Rao Holkar and Jankoji Shinde had tasted the Afghan steel, they did not stir out of their positions to the last. In this case, there was practically no fighting on the left wing of the Shah and right of the Marathas. Towards the close of the day, when the Centre and the right wing had been cleared, Shah Pasand Khan and Najib-ud-Daulah delivered an assault on right wing of Marathas. Malhar Rao Holkar followed by most of the troops of Jankoji, was the first to fly away in an utter rout. Jankoji was wounded and pushed back with a great lose. (Ganda Singh, 1959).

Thousands of Maratha soldiers were slain, 22,000 men and women were made captives, while 2 lakh draught cattle, 50,000 horses, several thousand camels, 500 elephants and cash and jewellery beyond calculation fell into the hands of the victors. He halted there only for a few days and then started for imperial capital where he arrived on 29th January. (Gupta, 1944).

1.8.10. Arrangements for Delhi, Sirhind, Patiala and Punjab

On his arrival at Delhi, in January 29, 1761 AD, Ahmad Shah Durrani confirmed Shah Alam Sani on the throne of Delhi, with Mirza Jawan Bakhsh as heir-apparent and ordered to strike coins and read *Khutba* in his name. Shujah-ud-Daulah was appointed the prime minister and Najib-ud-Daulah the commander-in-Chief of the forces. Zain Khan was appointed the governor of Sirhind with Lachhmi Narayan as his *Diwan*, while Sardar Ala Singh of Patiala was recognized by the prescript issued on March 29, 1761 AD, the ruler of the territories held by him. Mirza Taqi was left at Patiala to collect the tribute of five lakhs of rupees promised by Ala Singh. (Sardesai, 1948).

When Shah occupied Lahore in October of 1759 AD, he had appointed Karimdad Khan as the governor of Punjab. But soon after Shah recalled him to his presence and in place of him, Sarbuland Khan was made the governor of the province. On Shah's arrival at Lahore in April 26, 1761 AD, Sarbuland Khan was transferred to Multan, and Khawaja Ubaid Khan was appointed to the Government of Lahore, while Raja Ghumand Chand Katauch was given the government of Doaba Bist Jullundur, with Saadat Khan and Sadiq Khan Afridi as his deputies. After these settlements, Shah returned to Afghanistan (Ganda Singh, 1959).

1.9. Conclusion

“Those who cannot learnt from history are doomed to repeat it.”

Winston Churchill

History is basically a lesson. In essence, history teaches us to move forward, recognize our mistakes and learn from them, and ultimately create a better existence for all. Ahmad Shah appeared on the scene in 1747 AD. His struggles against Mughals were successful and he defeated them many times. He became the ruler of almost whole of the Punjab in 1752 AD. He appointed a large number of officials to administer his conquered territories. In 1757 AD, he left his son Timur as his Viceroy in Lahore, but the prince could not stay in the country for

more than a year having repulsed by the Marathas. Marathas occupied all his conquered territories in India. His struggles against Marathas were also successful and he defeated them many times, especially in the third battle of Panipat on 14th January 1761 AD. The battle of Panipat was a great successful event for him. He re-occupied all his lost territories in India and re-appointed his own officials there. For example, in 1761 AD, Sarbuland Khan was transferred to Multan, and Khawaja Ubaid Khan was appointed to the Government of Lahore, while Raja Ghumand Chand Katauch was given the government of Doaba Bist Jullundur, with Saadat Khan and Sadiq Khan Afridi as his deputies. Zain Khan was appointed the governor of Sirhind with Lachhmi Narayan as his Diwan, while Ala Singh of Patiala was recognized the ruler of the territories held by him.

Ahmad Shah Durrani not only re-occupied his lost territories and appointed his own officials in India but he also protected Indian rulers (Muslims and non-Muslims) and their territories from the inroad of the Marathas. All his efforts in India were directed to annexing the adjoining rich country of the Punjab, securing the safety of its frontiers with a view to relieving the needs of his poor country. It was with this object in view that he wished to have on the throne of Delhi a person friendly to himself as he confirmed Shah Alam Sani on the throne of Delhi, with Mirza Jawan Bakhsh as heir-apparent. Shujah-ud-Daulah was appointed the prime minister and Najib-ud-Daulah the commander-in-Chief of the forces.

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