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# **Battle of Tarain: A Turning Point in Indian History**

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**ABSTRACT:** The First Battle of Tarain, also spelt as the First Battle of Taraori, was fought in 1191 between the invading Ghurid army led by Muhammad of Ghor and the Rajput Confederacy led by Prithviraj Chauhan, near Tarain (modern Taraori in Haryana, India). The battle ended in decisive victory for the Rajputs; however, Muhammad of Ghor managed to escape and returned to Ghazni.

After the Ghurid armies were routed, they retreated to the Ghazni and left garrison of 2,000 soldiers under Zia ud-Din Tulaki to secure the fort of Tabarhind (present day Bhatinda)<sup>[3]</sup> to delay the Rajput army and was successful in keeping them at bay for thirteen months, while Muhammad of Ghor, during these months, raised a stronger army of 120,000 men, and invaded again, leading to the Second Battle of Tarain, which ended Chauhan's rule.<sup>[4]</sup>

**KEYWORDS:** Tarain, battle, first, second, turning point, India, history

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary sources for the battle include Tajul-Ma'asir of Hasan Nizami (on the Ghurid side) and Jayanaka's Prithviraja Vijaya (on the Chahamana side).<sup>[5]</sup>

Later sources for the battle include the following Persian-language chronicles:<sup>[6]</sup>

- Minhaj-i-Siraj's Tabaqat-i Nasiri (1260 CE)
- Abdul Malik Isami's Futuh-us-Salatin (c. 1350)
- Yahya bin Ahmad Sirhindi's Tarikh-I-Mubarakshahi (1434 CE)
- Nizam al-Din Ahmad's Tabaqat-i Akbari (1593-1594 CE)
- `Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni's Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh (c. 1590s CE)
- Firishta's Tarikh-i Firishta (early 17th century)[1,2,3]

These chroniclers call Prithviraj by various names including "Rae Kolah Pithorā" (Minhaj), "Pithor Rai" (Sirhindi), and "Pithow Ray" (Firishta). They call Prithviraj's commander-in-chief Govind Rai Tomar as "Gobind Rae" (Minhaj); "Gobind Rai" (Sirhindi); Khand, Khanda, or Khandi (Nizam al-Din and Bada'uni); and Chawund Ray (Firishta).<sup>[6]</sup>

The later sources written in Indic languages include Hammira Mahakavya and Prithviraj Raso.<sup>[7]</sup>

### **Background**

Mu'izz ad-Din captured Multan in 1175, and in 1178, unsuccessfully invaded the Chaulukya (Solanki) Kingdom in present-day Gujarat and northern Rajasthan. Subsequently, the Ghurids defeated the Ghaznavids, and conquered Lahore in 1186.<sup>[8]</sup>

Mu'izz ad-Din sent his envoy - the Chief Judge Qiwam-ul Mulk Ruknud Din Hamza - to the court of Prithviraj, to persuade him to come to a peaceful agreement.<sup>[9]</sup> Tajul-Ma'asir, a chronicle by the Muslim writer Hasan Nizami, describes the envoy as a "prominent dignitary", who conveyed Mu'izz ad-Din's message to Prithviraj "in a refined and graceful manner", using "elegant language". The Chahamana-sponsored text Prithviraja Vijaya, which describes Mu'izz ad-Din as an "evil" beef-eating "demon", portrays the envoy as an extremely ugly person whose "ghastly white" complexion made him appear to be suffering from a skin disease, and whose speech was like "the cry of wild birds".<sup>[10]</sup> Prithviraj refused to agree to the Ghurid envoy's terms, which according to Hasan Nizami, included converting to Islam and accepting the Ghurid suzerainty.<sup>[10]</sup> Mu'izz ad-Din then decided to invade the Chahamana kingdom.<sup>[9]</sup>

The Ghurid campaign that led to the first battle of Tarain<sup>[4,5,6]</sup> may have started in 1190, but the actual battle was most probably fought in the winter of 1191 CE.<sup>[11]</sup>

The battle

Sometime before 1191, Mu'izz ad-Din's army captured the Tabarhindh fort (probably present-day Bathinda), which was presumably under Chahamana control.<sup>[12]</sup> According to Sirhindi, sometime in 1191 (Hijri year 587), Prithviraj marched against the Ghurid army with infantry, cavalry, and an elephant force.<sup>[13]</sup> Mu'izz ad-Din was about to leave Tabarhindah, when he received the news of Prithviraj's approach; he then marched against Prithviraj, and the two armies met at Tarain.<sup>[6]</sup>

Prithviraj was accompanied by a number of feudatory rulers, whom Minhaj describes as "the whole of the Ranas of Hind". These rulers included Govind Rai, the ruler of Delhi. Sirhindi states that Govind Rai Tomar, seated on an elephant, was at the frontline, suggesting that he was the commander-in-chief of Prithviraj's army.<sup>[13]</sup> Sirhindi and later chroniclers, such as Nizam al-Din and Bada'uni, describe Govind Rai as a brother of Prithviraj.<sup>[13]</sup> Firishta also describes Prithviraj and Govind Rai as brothers, stating that the two men marched against the Ghurids in alliance with other Indian rulers[7,8,9]. Firishta portrays Govind Rai as someone who was almost equally as powerful as Prithviraj, presumably because Govind Rai was the ruler of Delhi, which had become politically important by Firishta's time.<sup>[14]</sup>

The Ghurid cavalry initiated the battle by launching arrows at the enemy center. The Chahamana forces counter-attacked from three sides and dominated the battle, pressuring the Ghurid army into a withdrawal.<sup>[15]</sup>

According to Sirhindi, the Ghurid troops suffered reverses despite having fought bravely: when Mu'izz ad-Din saw this, he charged against Govind Rai.<sup>[13]</sup> Minhaj states that Mu'izz ad-Din, who was riding a horse, attacked Govind Rai with a lance, hitting his mouth and breaking two of his teeth. Govind Rai retaliated with a javelin, severely wounding Mu'izz ad-Din's upper arm.<sup>[16]</sup> According to Minhaj, Mu'izz ad-Din would have died or been captured, had a young soldier not led his horse to safety. After his departure from the battlefield, the Ghurid troops were disheartened and defeated.<sup>[12]</sup> The Sultan turned his charger's head round and receded, and from the agony of the wound he was unable to continue on horseback any longer. Defeat befell the army of Islām so that it was irretrievably routed.

Minhaj in *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*<sup>[16]</sup>

Mu'izz ad-Din left for Ghazni, leaving behind a garrison at Tabarhindah. Prithviraj besieged the fort, and captured it sometime before the second battle of Tarain.<sup>[12]</sup> He did not pursue the Ghurid army, either not wanting to invade hostile territory or misjudging Mu'izz ad-Din's ambition.<sup>[17]</sup>

## II. DISCUSSION

The Second Battle of Tarain was fought in 1192 between the Ghurid forces of Muhammad Ghuri and the Rajput Confederacy of Prithviraj Chauhan. It took place near Tarain (modern Taraori), which is 110 kilometres (68 mi), north of Delhi. The battle ended in a decisive victory for the invading Ghurids and their successful penetration in north Indian plain.

The battle is regarded as a watershed event in Medieval India history as it led to the destruction of Rajput powers for a while and laid the foundation of Muslim rule in North India, which led to the establishment of Delhi Sultanate.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

Background

Prithviraj Chauhan's forces had defeated the Ghurids at the First Battle of Tarain in 1191. The Ghurid king Mu'izz al-Din, who was seriously injured in the battle, returned to Ghazni, and made preparations to avenge his defeat[10,11,12]. Historians generally date the second battle of Tarain to 1192, although it possibly happened in late 1191.<sup>[12]</sup>

Size of the forces

According to the 16th-17th century writer Firishta, in the battle, "the Chauhan army consisted of 3,000 elephants, 300,000 cavalry and infantry", which is considered an exaggeration by modern historians. According to Satish Chandra, the figures were exaggerated in order to "emphasise the challenge faced by Muizzuddin and the scale of his victory".<sup>[7]</sup> Kaushik Roy similarly notes that Muslim chroniclers regularly exaggerated Hindu military strength to glorify the Muslim kings, and 300,000 was probably the theoretical number that could potentially be mobilized by all the Rajput kingdoms at the time.<sup>[6]</sup>



According to Indian sources like Hammir Mahakavya and Prithviraj Raso, the Chahamana army was simultaneously engaged on multiple fronts and Prithviraj had only a part of his army at the battlefield. The rest of his army was about to reach Prithviraj but the fate was already decided in favour of Muizuddin.<sup>[13]</sup>

According to Minhaj-i-Siraj, Mu'izz al-Din brought 120,000 fully armored men to battle,<sup>[5]</sup> He personally commanded an elite cavalry force of 40,000 men. According to historian Kaushik Roy, while the real strength of the armies is not certain, it can be speculated that Prithviraj's army was numerically superior.<sup>[6]</sup>

#### Battle

The battle occurred on the same field as the first one. Knowing the Chahamana forces were well-disciplined, the Ghurids did not want to engage in melee combat with them.<sup>[14]</sup> Instead of fighting upfront like they did in the First battle of Tarain Ghurids used treachery and diplomacy to defeat the Rajputs.<sup>[15]</sup> The Taj-ul ma asir by Hasan Nizami states that as soon as Ghori arrived on the battlefield Prithviraj sent him a formal note saying, ""It would be prudent for you to return to your homeland, and we have no intention of pursuing you".<sup>[16]</sup> Ghori sent back a reply to him saying, "Upon the directive of my sibling, the reigning authority, I have arrived here to face adversity. Grant me the opportunity to dispatch a knowledgeable envoy to my brother, conveying the extent of your might. I seek his approval to initiate peace negotiations, suggesting the acquisition of Tarhind, Punjab, and Multan for us, while the remaining regions [13,14,15] fall under your jurisdiction.".<sup>[16]</sup>

From the accounts of Hasan Nizami, Muhammad ufi as well as Firishta, it is quite clear that Ghori deceived his opponent who accepted it as a genuine truce.<sup>[16]</sup> The Ghurids army was formed into five units, and four units were sent to attack the enemy flanks and rear.<sup>[14]</sup> They attacked the Chahamana army before sunrise who passed the night in slumber and merry-making.<sup>[16]</sup>

According to Minhaj, Mu'izz ad-Din directed a light cavalry force of 10,000 mounted archers, divided into four divisions, to surround the Chahamana forces on the four sides.<sup>[17]</sup> He instructed these soldiers not to engage in combat when the enemy advanced to attack, and instead feign retreat in order to exhaust the Chahamana elephants, horses, and infantry.<sup>[18]</sup>

In hopes of causing a break in the enemy lines, Mu'izz al-Din ordered his fifth unit to feign retreat. The Chahamana forces charged the fleeing Ghurid unit, as the Ghurids expected. The Ghurids then sent a fresh cavalry unit of 12,000 and repelled the enemy advance. The remaining Ghurid forces then attacked and the Chahamana troops fled in panic.<sup>[14]</sup> According to Minhaj, Mu'izz ad-Din's strategy "exhausted and wearied the unbelievers", ultimately resulting in a "victory to Islam".<sup>[18]</sup>

#### Aftermath

Minhaj states that Prithviraj ("Rae Pithora") dismounted from his elephant, and fled from the battlefield on a horse. He was, however, captured in the neighbourhood of Sursuti, and later "dispatched to hell".<sup>[18]</sup> Most medieval sources state that Prithviraj was taken to the Chahamana capital Ajmer, where Muhammad planned to reinstate him as a Ghurid vassal. Sometime later, Prithviraj rebelled against Muhammad, and was killed for treason.<sup>[19]</sup>

The Ghurid forces subjugated the entire Chahamana territory of "Siwalikh"<sup>[18]</sup> (or Sawalakh, that is, Sapadalaksha).<sup>[20]</sup> The Ghurids then appointed his son Govindaraja IV on the throne of Ajmer as their vassal. In 1192 CE, Prithviraj's younger brother Hariraja dethroned Govindaraja, and recaptured a part of his ancestral kingdom, but was later defeated by the Ghurid general Qutb al-Din Aibak.<sup>[21]</sup> The Ghurids subsequently defeated another powerful king - Jayachandra [16,17,18] of Gahadavala dynasty - at the Battle of Chandawar, and conquered parts of northern India as far as Bengal.

### III. RESULTS

#### The Battles of Tarain

The Tarain battles changed the course of the history of the Indian subcontinent as they led to the establishment of the first Islamic sultanates in India. Both the battles were fought between Mohammed Ghori and Prithviraj Chauhan.

The first battle of Tarain (1191 CE)

- The confederacy under the command of Prithviraj Chauhan of Delhi fought the Ghurids of Afghanistan led by Mohammed Ghori.
- Mohammed Ghori was defeated as Prithviraj annexed Tabarhind after a siege of 12 months.
- But Ghori managed to escape to Ghazni where he regrouped and raised another army.
- The second battle of Tarain (1192 CE)
- But this time the Rajput confederacy weakened because of a fallout between Prithviraj and Jayachandra (Gahadaval ruler of Kanauj).
- Muhammad Ghori now made careful preparations and marched with 120000 men.
- The fate of Prithviraj Chauhan is disputed about whether he was captured or killed or ruled under the suzerainty of Ghurids.

Aftermaths of Battles of Tarain

After the Battles of Tarain, the Ghurid armies captured the forts of Hansi, Saraswati, and Samana. Then they attacked and captured Ajmer.

- It is also said that Prithviraj was allowed to rule over Ajmer as a Ghurid vassal for a while, before being executed for conspiracy.

The Tomar ruler of Delhi was also ousted soon and Delhi and eastern Rajasthan came under Ghurid rule. [19,20]  
Meanwhile, Prithviraj's son moved to Ranthambore and found a new Chauhan Dynasty.

Ghuri went back to Afghanistan and left behind Ghurid generals who continued to attack and conquer neighboring lands.

The powerful Gahadavala kingdom was still seated at Kanauj after the second Battle of Tarain.

- Jayachandra was the ruler of the most powerful kingdom in northern India at that time.
- He had already suffered a defeat against the Sena kings of Bengal when the Ghurid attack began.
- After Tarain, Muhammad Ghori returned to Ghazni and left India in charge of his slave general Qutbuddin Aibak.
- From 1192 to 1194 CE, the Turks led by Aibak overran part of the upper doab without any opposition from Gahadavalas.
- In 1194 CE, Muhammad Ghori returned to India and crossed Jamuna with a force of 50,000 cavalries and moved towards Kanauj.
- Battle of Chandawar: The battle between Muhammad Ghori and Jaichandra takes place in Chandawar where Jaichandra was defeated and killed in action.
- Muhammad Ghori marched to Benaras and ravaged it as many temples Benaras destroyed.
- Ghori next captured the powerful forts of Bayana and Gwalior to guard the southern flank of Delhi.
- After this, his slave general Qutbuddin Aibak conquered Mahoba, Kalinjar, and Khajuraho from the Chandelas.
- Aibak also defeated the Solanki king, Bhima II of Gujarat, but could not annex the lands.
- Another slave general, Bakhtiyar Khalji was appointed in charge of the areas east of Benaras. He made frequent raids into Bihar, because of the power vacuum there.
- Bakhtiyar Khalji burnt down Nalanda University and Vikramsila University and massacred the Buddhist monks there.
- He gathered immense wealth through plundering and raised his army with it. [20]
- In 1204, he marched towards Nadia in Bengal where the Sena capital of Nabadwip was.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Conquest Beyond Tarain:

The aftermath saw Turkish dominance expanding into Bihar and Bengal. Muizzuddin's return to India in 1194 led to the Battle of Chandawar, a fierce encounter near Kanauj that solidified Turkish control. The expedition to Banaras further secured their foothold, ravaging temples and extending their influence to the borders of Bihar.

Legacy of Tarain:

The battles of Tarain and Chandawar laid the foundations of Turkish rule in North India. Although Muizzuddin lived until 1206, his reign saw the establishment of Turkish control over powerful forts, including Bayana and Gwaliyar, guarding the southern flank of Delhi.

The Battle of Tarain stands as a pivotal moment in Indian medieval history, marked by a series of conflicts that shaped the political landscape of the subcontinent. With the clash between Prithviraj Chauhan and Muhammad Ghori at its center, the battles of Tarain showcased the strategic prowess and military might of both leaders. The outcome of these confrontations had far-reaching consequences, influencing the establishment of Ghurid rule in Northern India. Despite Prithviraj Chauhan's initial triumph, the subsequent defeats underscored the challenges of maintaining a united front against external invasions. The Battle of Tarain serves as a testament to the dynamic nature of power struggles in medieval India, where shifting alliances and military strategies played a decisive role in shaping the destiny of the region.[20]

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2. ^ Kaushik Roy 2004, pp. 38–39: "The age of around 800 AD could be termed as age of steepe horsemens. The Rajputs were about to be outclassed by their outdated methods of War in era of brutality. In 1191, Ghori fought the Rajput confederacy of one lakh Rajput calvalrymen led by Prithviraj at place called Tarain"
3. ^ "Bhatinda History". Government of Punjab.
4. ^ Kaushik Roy 2004, pp. 40–42: "Cavalry was not suited for laying siege to forts and Rajputs lacked both the siege machines and infantry to storm and destroy fortress walls. Tulaki was able to keep Prithviraj at bay for thirteen months. Within this time, Mahmud Ghori had raised 120,000 cavalry."
5. ^ Cynthia Talbot 2015, pp. 29–30.
6. ^ a b c Cynthia Talbot 2015, pp. 86–87.
7. ^ Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 88.
8. ^ Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 36.
9. ^ a b Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 29.
10. ^ a b Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 30.
11. ^ Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 44.
12. ^ a b c Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 47.
13. ^ a b c d Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 87.
14. ^ Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 87-88.
15. ^ Spencer C. Tucker 2009, p. 263.
16. ^ a b Cynthia Talbot 2015, p. 86.
17. ^ Satish Chandra 2006, p. 25.
18. K. A. Nizami 1992, p. 162, 172:"Muizzuddin's army had four veteran war-lords of Ghazni-experienced, determined and desterous--Kharbak, Kharmil, Ilah, Mukalba. Each had under his command a huge army, Besides them there were--Tajuddin Yalduz, Qubacha and Aibek. The Sultan started from Ghazni in 587/1191, reached Tarain in 588/1191-92 and pitched his tent at the same place where he had suffered a serious defeat a year before. According to Ferishta, 150 Rajput rais had come to the feld with Rai Pithora, determined to crush or be crushed :- Bakhtiyar did not belong to an obscure family. His uncle, Muhammad bin Mahmud, had fought against Prithvi Rai at the second battle of Tarain"
19. ^ Rima Hooja 2006, p. 349.
20. ^ K. A. Nizami 1992, p. 164:"The details supplied by Isami about the actual disposition of the armies are more interesting. According to him Govind Rai was the mugaddam of the Rajput forces. He fought in advance of Pithoras army; Pithora fought in the centre. The left wing of Pithora's army was under Bhola, who was the wazir; the right wing was led by Badamsa Rawal"



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