



Department of Distance Education Punjabi University, Patiala

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Lesson No.

- 2.1 : Battle of Talikota - 1565 AD
- 2.2 : Military Organisation of Marathas Under Shivaji
- 2.3 : Military Organisation of Sikhs under Maharaja Ranjit Singh
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BATTLE OF TALIKOTA (1565 A.D.)

Introduction

The battle of Talikota is probably the most decisive battle in the history of South India. It can be described as the Waterloo of the Vijaynagar empire. In this battle, the military strength of Vijaynagar empire was shattered almost completely. The damage was so irreparable that it never came anywhere near recovering its lost glory.

(a) Background

When the famous Bahmani empire of South India began to decline early in the 16th century, independent sultanates were founded by its rebellious chieftains at Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golconda. These three could expand their territories only at the expense of the Hindu empire of Vijaynagar. So, there were frequent wars between the two sides. The battle of Talikota (1565 AD) was the culmination of the rivalry between the Muslim rulers by Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golconda and Hindu king Ramaraya. And the main causes of the battle were:

- (i) Dependence of the Vijaynagar on foreigners, Portuguese and the Muslims to man its artillery. It is surprising that right through Indian history the artillery was always manned by muslims.
- (ii) Trust imposed by Ramaraya in Muslim soldiers who betrayed when two of his Muslim generals betrayed him by deserting over to the muslim confederacy.
- (iii) The Southern Hindu soldiers were neither dressed for riding nor were familiar with the horses.
- (iv) Heavy dependence on elephants as weapon of war.
- (v) Nepotism, where the relatives of the king became nobles and generals and tried their hands of the command of troops in battle and failed.

Ramaraya had been taking advantage of the mutual hatred, jealousy and disunion among the sultanates. He intervened militarily in the quarrels between Bijapur and Ahmednagar. Thus Muslim kings were alarmed at the increase in the power of the Hindu kingdom, which had occasions to intervene in the affairs of the Deccan. Eventually, Ali Adil Shah of Bijapur took the initiative in forming an alliance of the Sultans of the Deccan and sent an envoy to Qutub Shah of Golconda and Nizam Sham of Ahmednagar. Ibrahim played a very crucial role in giving a concrete shape to the alliance. Having thus formed an alliance Adil Shah demanded Yadgir, Bagalkot and Mudgal from Ramaraya. But as expected Ramaraya refused and the war became imminent.

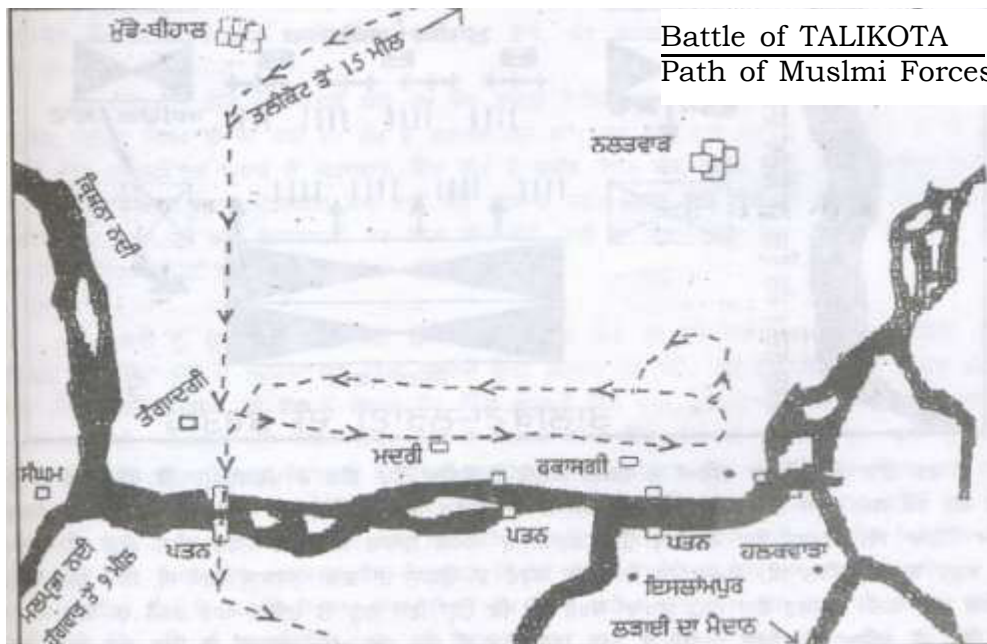
(b) Strength of the opposing forces

Estimates about the strength of the two armies is controversial. J.N. Sarkar

puts Hindu army at about 6000 horses and 1,00,000 foot. The Sultan's army is put at 50,000 horses and 3000 foot. The armies of Sultans enjoyed a clear superiority in the cavalry. They had about 8000 Khurasani and Turkish cavalymen. The Hindu cavalry on the other hand was very poor. The Sultan's artillery park was very impressive. In comparison, Vijaynagar army had a few antiquated guns. Hindu infantry was also ill-armed, ill-clad and ill-trained. They also lacked good generals. Ramaraya himself was over 80 years of age. His brothers Venkatadri and Tirumal also being fairly old.

(c) Strategy to cross river Krishna

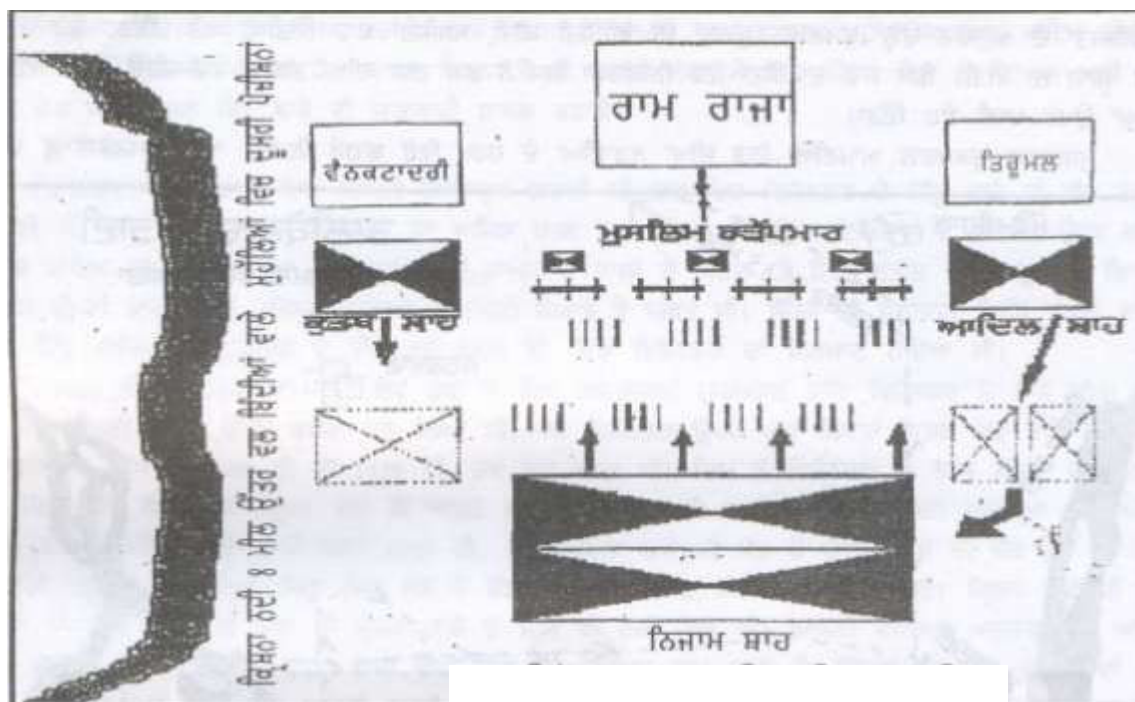
Muslims executed a strategy to cross the river Krishna which was reminiscent of Alexander's crossing of the Jhelum. Ramaraya was waiting in force at the expected point of crossing. The muslims created the impression that they did not intend to cross there and marched eastwards along the northern bank for two days in succession. Ramaraya marched parallel to them along the southern bank on the third day, the muslim army detached a contingent to continue the march, while a strong body swung left and rode back hard in a forced march towards their original starting point. Thus Vijaynagar army was misled by this move and they kept on following the detachment. The muslims covered the reverse distance in 12 hours. The crossing was effected and Ramaraya found the Muslim army at his back. He turned back but did not offer battle immediately.



(d) Deployment and the Battle

The Hindu army drew up in the traditional fashion with the center (Ramaraya), the left wing (Tirumal) and the right wing (Venkatadri).

The Muslim center was held by Husain Nizam Shah. He kept his 200 heavy guns in the front. They were chained in a manner reminiscent of Babur, with spaces left at regular intervals for the cavalry to sally out or retire. The heavy guns were followed by the zarb-zans and zamaburaks in equal numbers in the second and third lines. The main body of the cavalry was placed behind the guns while about 2000 Turkish horse archers screened the heavy guns. The left wing had the troops of Qutb Shah, and the right wing the troops of Adil Shah under the able leadership of Kishwar Khan Lari.

**Deployment of Battle of Talikota**

After the usual exchange of gun-fire, the Hindu right wing charged on the Muslim left wing. There was a tough fight and a stalemate was reached. A similarly tough fight ensued on the Muslim right wing also. The battle raged for about three hours. Gradually, the resolute leadership and the application of some skilful Cossack tactics (feigning retreat and then shooting arrows by turning back) by Kishwar Khan started telling upon Tirumal. Finally, they were forced back. Kishwar Khan, at this stage, displayed yet another piece of brilliant generalship and dispatched a contingent of 5000 Turkish horsemen to the center.

Some brilliant generalship was displayed at the center also by Rumi Khan. The qarawal of the 2000 horse archers occupied the vanguard of the Hindu center and feigned retreat. As they were pursued, they slipped through the spaces left between the guns while Rumi Khan peppered the pursuers with his guns. Disturbed by this, Ramaraya mounted a second attack with his troops in a dense mass. Again Rumi Khan blasted at them with murderous effect and foiled the attack. If the Muslim historians are to be believed, he used bag full of thick slug-like copper coins instead of shot, and in one salvo claimed the lives of 5000 Hindus. At this critical moment some 2000 selected Khurasani horsemen alongwith the 5000 horsemen sent by Kishwar Khan were unleashed on the enemy. That turned out to be the decisive stroke. Ramaraya was perhaps taken prisoner in the melee and executed, or got killed otherwise. In any case, his fall signalled the end and the usual rout ensued. Venkatadri alone could escape; Tirumal was killed.

(e) Conclusion

Many were killed in the pursuit also. Traditionally, a casualty figure of 100000 on the Hindu side is often quoted. However, we agree with J.N. Sarkar that the losses in killed must have been in the vicinity of 16000 or so, with those in injured being about three times, going by the standard rule of thumb.

Then followed the terrible sack and destruction of the grand city of Vijayanagar. Before the army of the Sultans could reach it, the robbers and the forest dwellers of the neighbourhood plundered it. The Muslim army started its work on the third day and, as the Portuguese historian Faria-y-Souza says, they plundered it for full five months. Perhaps not a single structure was left intact. As R. Sewell says (in 'A Forgotten Empire') : "Never perhaps in the history of the world has such havoc been wrought, and wrought so suddenly, on so splendid a city; teeming with a wealthy and industrious population in the full plenitude of prosperity one day, and on the next, seized, pillaged and reduced to ruins, amid scenes of savage massacre and horrors beggaring description."

Ramaraya paid heavily for his poor generalship and inferior army organisation — an old empire was reduced to a howling wilderness in a matter of just a few days.

Military Organisation of Marathas under Shivaji

Introduction

The Marathas hail from the coastal strip of Maharashtra state and the high table-land to the east of the Western Ghats including the Konkan and the Deccan. The Marathas are tough, tenacious and capable of great endurance. They are of small build but wiry and full of life.

Before the birth of Shivaji, there was no Maratha Kingdom. When the Muslims invaded their country in the last decade of the 13th century, the Marathas gave them a tough fight. During this contest of power in the Deccan between Hindus and Muslims, the Bhonsles rose to power at the beginning of the 17th century under Malogi Bhonsle and Shahji who were given the command of 5,000 horses by the Mughal emperor. Shivaji, born on April 20, 1627, was related to the leading families of the time in the area. Shivaji's father Shahji was indeed a king maker and later fought against the Moghuls on behalf of the Nizam Shahi kings of Ahmednagar but soon Shahji carved out a small principality for himself.

By the time Shivaji arrived on the scene, the Marathas had already become famous as warriors and statesmen. The long rule of aliens helped the Marathas to build themselves up as a powerful military force. It was Shivaji who introduced a new spirit of patriotic feeling which was missing so far. He combined the power of Marathas that so far lay scattered into one united and invincible whole until it expanded in all possible directions of the Indian sub-continent. The weakness of the central government at Delhi and uncertain conditions in the Deccan helped the Marathas to rise and soon they challenged the suzerainty of the Mughals. It was Shivaji who after centuries of progressive decadence under foreign Muslim rule put Indian military traditions in the fore front in their truly national perspective.

Shivaji's eventful career lasted only for 34 years. It all began with the occupation of Torna in 1646 when he was very young. He wanted to be a master of his own kingdom. Though uneducated, he proved himself a capable, not only a military leader but also as an able administrator. After Torna, Shivaji occupied Chakan and Sinhagad and fortified it. After this Purandar was also captured, it was one of the most strategically situated forts in the area.

(b) Techniques of fighting

It is supposed that Shivaji only fought guerilla warfare. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the initial stages, Shivaji perforce used guerilla tactics against the forces of Bijapur as well as the Mughal armies because this strength was very small and his resources were very meagre. But whenever an opportunity arose he would not hesitate to make use of his troops in a well-planned battle in

which they would fight like normal troops do. But when he had much superior forces pitted against his small number of troops, he would follow the guerilla warfare in which his forces would make sudden raids on the superior enemy forces and then would disappear into the hilly areas after capturing military stores or enemy treasures. The battle in which he defeated Bijapur forces which were sent under their well known commander Afzal Khan, was fought in 1659. It is known as the battle of Partapgarh. Shivaji had in his possession 40 forts by now, in which he had kept his small garrisons for fighting the Bijapur forces. Shivaji initially adopted guerilla tactics, by which he harassed the army of Bijapur by constant raids so that their movement forward was made as difficult as it could be. Later on, Shivaji felt that if he could entice a stronger army of Afzal Khan into areas where he could give him a pitched battle and destroy a better part of his force, he could gain a major victory. Meanwhile, Shivaji planned to defend some of his 40 forts only. He could take out a fairly large number of troops from the forts as well as from his reserves to fight the battle of Partapgarh.

Shivaji was one of the very few Indian generals who never suffered a defeat during his eventful career of thirty four years of regular campaigning whenever he was in command in person. One of the reasons for the speedy success of the Marathas under Shivaji was the truly national character of their army. He organised the army on scientific lines which was best suited to the geographical location of Deccan. A chain of fortresses dominating most of the vital ground needed light and highly organised forces depending mostly on speed, mobility and surprise.

A French officer gives the picture of the great Shivaji's army during his invasion of the Madras coast in 1677, "The camp of Shivaji is without pomp, without women and without baggage. It has only two tents both of simple coarse stuff and very small - one of them for himself and the other for his Prime Minister. There are ordinarily three horses to every two men, which contributes to the speed that he takes, he thus surprises his enemies who believe him to be far distant when he falls upon them".

(c) Military Organisation

During his entire career, he was mainly confined to the hilly country. His lightly equipped army was mainly responsible for many of his victories over his superior enemies. Such a force was most suited to the particular type of the country in which the Marathas operated. At this death Shivaji left a regular army of 40,000 cavalry, 10,000 infantry and a strong navy.

The main components of Shivaji's army were:

- (I) Cavalry
- (II) Infantry
- (III) Artillery, and
- (IV) Navy

(I) Cavalry was consisted of archers, spearmen and swordsmen who were used

mostly as shock-troops. Cavalry was considered as the superior service and its Senapati was senior to his infantry Senapati. The smallest unit of cavalry was composed of 25 bargirs with a havildar at his head. Five havals made up on Jumladar while ten Jumals of 1,2500 bargirs had a hazari over them. A Panch hazari was in command of 5 hazari unit over whom there was a sar-e-naubat directly responsible to the king.

Silladars-troopers having their own charges also formed a part of the cavalry though they were considered inferior to the bargirs paid and equipped by the state.

(II) The infantry garrisoned all forts and in the early stages was the main force under Shivaji. The smallest unit of the infantry was ten in number under a naik. The havildar was incharge of five such naiks. Two havals made one Jumledar. There were 10 Jumledars (1000 soldiers) under the hazari. The sar-e-naubat of the infantry had seven such hazaris under him. 2,000 Mavals formed a splendid corps of infantry for Shivaji's personal bodyguard. They were excellent troops for fighting in the hills.

(III) Shivaji had managed to obtain same guns from the foundries at Surat while others were captured from the Muslim rulers of the south these manned the forts. Shivaji was extremely weak in this arm. In fact Marathas never had an efficient fight artillery. The performance of these guns was not very accurate.

The supply system of Marathas did not present very many problems. Animals like elephants, horses, camels and bullocks were used for transportation. The saddle of the soldier was his home. Shivaji's strength lay in the Spartan simplicity of his army, which resulted in an unusual mobility. The army was maintained by the state and all payments were made regularly. During the campaigns, the army lived on Malkhagiri. A paga hazari received 1,000 huns per year and a paga 5 hazari 2,000 huns. A hun was equivalent to about three rupees at that time. A subedar was given 400 huns.

The army was very lightly equipped and its weapons did not in any way effect its mobility. Heavy and medium guns were fixed at forts. The principal weapon of attack and defence were the sword and shield. Troops were generally armed with muskets, matchlocks, spears, daggers, clubs and bows. Armour-Kavach of steel was also used by officers for personal protection. The horsemen had a coat of coarse muslim cloth for protection. The rest of the army equipped themselves as best as possible. No female or dancers was allowed to accompany the army during campaigns. No women or child was to be taken captive. Great chivalry was shown to women. Cows were exempted from seizure. Cultivators were treated with equal respect were not molested. Shivaji's army discipline was of a very high order and was slightly enforced.

(d) Forts

The country-side of Maharashtra was ideally suited for establishing a chain of outposts and forts. As we see them today, it is obvious that Shivaji and his officers must have spent a good deal of time in fixing the sites for new forts which required

a good knowledge of the country. It goes to Shivaji's credit that these forts are still tactically sound though with the advance in the science of warfare they have lost their value as before. All strategic points and approaches into the country were guarded with these sentinels which were always well stocked with equipment, stores and provisions, building material and medicines. They were strongly garrisoned and could stand long sieges. They were so situated that in times of emergency they could support each other. Each fort was under a havildar. He was helped by a number of assistants who all had military duties and responsibilities of the garrison. One of them was a Brahmin *sabnis* who had the civil and revenue charge of the area adjoining the fort. A *prabhu karaknavis* (Sarnaubat) also assisted the havildar and was responsible for the grain and fodder, military stores and repairs to the fort. These three formed the most important trio of officials in a fort and served as a check on each other. There were detailed written orders for each of these officials and an efficient system of check and counter-check was constantly in operation. The garrison was also a mixture of many castes.

There was a regular cadre of officers who had to take an oath of loyalty to the king. The cadre was restricted but there was no bar to the entry of men from lower ranks and classes on having proved their worth in the field of battle. Besides men from the princely and feudal classes who provided the leadership, there were generals who won quick promotion by sheer dint of merit. An officer could be enlisted and dismissed directly by the King. The Commander-in-Chief - *senapati* was member of the Council of Ministers - *ashta pradhan* and sat next to the King on his left. Most of the senior officers of the state held civil as well as military appointments. This meant that one could be detailed for any military duty in case of emergency. All the troops recruited after careful check and those already in service had to stand surely for the new entrants.

Conclusion

Shivaji died so suddenly on April 14, 1680 that his succession could not be organised properly. His eldest son had accepted the benevolent protection of the Mughals. Sambhaji was given to excessive drinking. A race that had once suddenly sprung in the costly ideal of the defence of the Hindu religion, gradually found itself mired in the same vices that had led to the downfall of many other races in the country.

LESSON NO. 2.3

**MILITARY ORGANISATION OF THE SIKHS UNDER
MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH**

INTRODUCTION :-

At a time when the Sikh Sardars were fighting between themselves in an effort to find empire for themselves, another Afghan invasion of India by Shah Zaman loomed large. The Sikhs were strongest community in North India both economically and militarily. But their disunity made them the weakest power to face the foreign invasion. Punjab, the land of five rivers, was sandwiched between the Afghans in the north west and the rising British power in the south east. The Sikhs, under Ranjit Singh were ruling the Punjab region.

Ranjit Singh was born in 1780. His father Maha Singh was the Sardar of Shukerchakia Misl. In those days, Punjab was ruled by many misls and the prominent amongst them were 12 misls. A misl was a sort of clan with its own Sardar who maintained a small army and ruled over an area, generally equivalent of a district or two. Ranjit Singh lost his father when he was 12 years old and he had to come up the hard way. He took over the control of Shukerchakia misl under the able guidance of his mother and Lakhpat Rai in 1792. At that time, his military forces were 1200 horses and 2000 infantry. By dint of his leadership qualities and military powers, he managed to capture other misls in Punjab and consolidated his rule by having a reasonably well organised and equipped army before starting on his conquest outside Punjab. He declared himself a Maharaja on 12 April 1801, before starting on his territorial expansion and captured Kangra, Kashmir Valley, Attock, Multan and Afghanistan. By a clever move Ranjit Singh ousted the Bhangis from Lahore and established himself in the capital.

(a) Rise of Ranjit Singh : After the return of Shah Zaman in 1799 ended the Muslim invasion of India leaving the Sikhs supreme in northern India. Ranjit Singh now had a free hand to pursue his aims. By this time, the Sikh misls had become a hot bed of intrigues and caused disunity and discord amongst the Sikhs. Ranjit had a thorny path to fame and kingship. But with the emergence of Ranjit Singh the Sikh system of confedracy and democracy changed. He had to subdue the independent chieftens and also the muslims. This he did by force, craft and diplomacy and finally by annexation and absorption of the property of his rivals. He soon founded a well-established Sikh state which soon became a force to be reckoned with by the British who were then extending their sway in north India.

He naturally came into clash with the English interests when he directed his attention to the south of the Sutlej. Ranjit Singh had heard the rising power of the English and he could not forget the fact they had defeated the powerful armies of Scindia and Holker. The English, on the other hand, were keen to placate the young monarch without coming into open conflict with him. They were thus, prepared to conciliate Ranjit Singh so as to keep a friendly buffer state. A treaty of friendship (Treaty of Amritsar) was signed in 1809 between Ranjit and the English according to which the power of Sikh ruler in areas south of the Sutlej was acknowledged but he

was not to keep more forces than were essential. He was also allowed a free hand north of river.

This treaty has been variously interpreted. Ranjit had realised that it was advantageous for him to have at least one frontier secured by means of a treaty. He also appreciated that his hold over the Punjab was not too secure as yet. With one danger and threat having been overcome, he was now able to meet others in the east and north-west. It is no doubt a tragedy in Sikh annals that for one reason or another Ranjit was unable to annex the cis-Sutlej states to his dominion. This is further heightened by the fact that these reactionary states served their own interests first and foremost than that of the Sikh cause by siding and abetting the English in their designs in the Punjab. Ranjit had campaigned all his life for the survival of the young state. He should first have dealt with the misls in southern Punjab and then handled the English firmly with his usual tactics of diplomatic and power pressure.

On the other hand, the English had gained considerably. From then onwards their sphere of influence shifted from the Jamuna up to the Sutlej. During the negotiations this was re-inforced with movements of their out-posts further north up to the river. The English had already stopped the incursions of the Gorkhas towards the south and these virile people naturally looked to the west for new dominions. Here they were faced by the hill rajas of Kangra. In this wrangle for power (1809-11) Ranjit occupied Kangra and the Gorkhas were forced to withdraw. Having settled one score he now looked towards the north and the west. By a clever stratagem he defeated the Afghans at Haidaru and occupied Attock in 1813. Immediately after this the Sikhs under Dewan Mukham Chand defeated the Afghans in a decisive battle in the plains of Chuch in 1813.

The process of territorial expansion continued. In 1823, the Afghans were defeated at Nowshehra and Ranjit entered Peshawar. He carried on relentless campaigns in the trans-Indus region. Peshawar was finally captured in 1834. These moves brought an end of the Afghan hold over the Punjab and added more power and prestige to the Sikh kingdom.

(b) Character of Ranjit Singh

There are many facets of Ranjit Singh's character. He was a great man. He had the power, authority and above all the capacity to unite and control the disunited Sikhs and founded an empire. Ranjit Singh's education and other training which go to make an efficient ruler were neglected by his parents. Though uneducated Ranjit was a clever and astute leader of soldiers and people. As a soldier he was reckless with the lives of his men under command to win a battle, but he was quite conscious of economising with their lives. "He was one of that order of minds which seem destined by nature to wind their way to destruction and achieve greatness." – Osborne

(c) Military System of Ranjit Singh

Ranjit Singh's new founded empire was based on rather an efficient and strong government which was well suited to the temperament of the Sikhs. Under him all the resources of the empire and the energies of the people, were devoted to expansionism and to the production of military means and equipment. Ranjit himself led most of the campaigns and even if reliable commander was appointed, he made sure that everything went according to his plans which were always drawn out in detail in advance.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not bring about any startling changes in the character and organisation of the Sikh army of the older days. All he did was to give them discipline and train them in the art of organised warfare. He was fully alive to harness the energies of the turbulent Sikhs into the natural form of guerilla warfare in which they were experts. He trained his army on modern lines through European adventurers who came and sought services with them. He employed European officers to improve the training of his army. Ventura, Court and Avitable were the well known European commanders in Ranjit Singh's army.

After the organisational changes instituted by Ranjit, the cavalry became the predominant arm and infantry came next. In 1822, Fauj-e-Khas was raised by the French generals. He continuously improved the tactics and tactical employment of his army. He was receptive to new ideas and never stood on his false dignity if anything better was pointed out to him.

Ranjit Singh's army was mainly divided into three parts :

1. **Cavalry** : There were three classes of cavalry :
 - (a) Regular Cavalry
 - (b) Ghorcharah Fauj
 - (c) Jagirdari Fauj
 - (a) The regular cavalry was the best in men, equipment, dress and discipline. They were trained under a French general Allard. The men and animals were specially picked for this branch.
 - (b) These troops were further sub-divided into Khas and Misaldar Sawars. The Ghorcharah Khas had only one regiment. The Misaldars were taken from the old chieftens who were defeated by Ranjit and had lost their territory.
 - (c) The cavalry force was maintained by Jagirdars. A Jagirdar had to keep and maintain a stipulated quota of horses and men fully equipped and well trained for possible employment by the state. They were a splendid fighting force who were mostly composed of Akalis for dangerous and desperate missions. There was no uniformity in their dress because they were maintained by the different Jagirdars. These forces had to be brought up every year for review and inspection. Strong measures were intituted to punish those who did not maintain the requisite strength laid down in the treaty.
2. **Infantry** : Initially infantry was not a popular arm for service with the Sikhs. But Ranjit encouraged the people to join this service by offering food pay, gaudy dress and good equipment. Ranjit Singh personally selected his infatary according to strict standards laid down by him. He attended the parades and drill, gave prices to good infantrymen on the spot. In 1812, two Sikh infantry regiments were formed. But it was in 1820, that the Sikh infantry was firmly established, expanded and equipped with modern arms and equipment. The Italian general Ventura was in charge of the Sikh infantry. This Sikh infantry were tough and could march long distances up to 30 miles a day for several days at a time.

The infantry battalion was 900 strong and was commanded by a Commandant (Kumedan) who was assisted by an Adjutant and Major. Each battalion had eight companies of 100 men each and each company had four sections of 25 men each commanded by a Havildar and a Naik as the assistant. The Sikh officers and men were well paid by the then standards. The total strength of the infantry in 1845 was about 70721 men.

(i) **Fauj-e-kilajat** : This was a special force on the same lines as the French Legion organised by Allard and Ventura. It consisted of three cavalry regiments under General Allard and five infantry battalions under General Ventura. Each battalions were distinguish headgears and was excellent in drill and field manoeuvres.

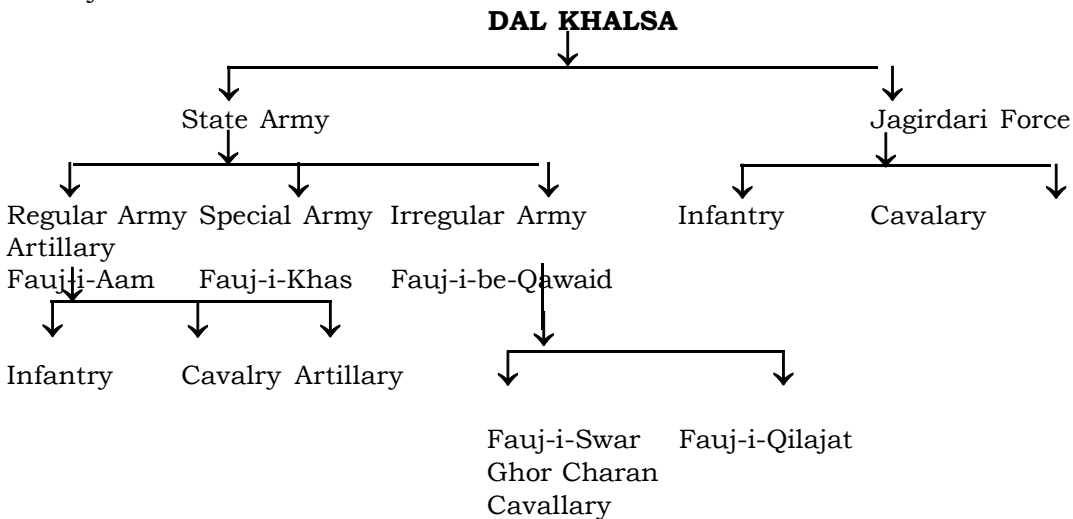
(ii) **Fauj-e-Khas** : A system of strong forts at strategic places were built and garrisoned by the Sikh army at Attock, Peshawar, Multan, Kanpur & Kashmir. They were self-contained with stores, foodgrains and war material for long sieges. The garrison troops were of lower standard than the other regular forces.

(iii) **Top-khana (Artillery)** : There were four types of artillery in Ranjit Singh's army :

- (a) Top Khana Shutri
- (b) Top Khana Jinsi
- (c) Top Khana Aspi
- (d) Top Khana File

The Sikh artillery was one wing they could be rightly proud of. Ranjit Singh had less than 500 guns of all types. The heavy guns (Top Khana Jinsi) required upto 100 cattle or more to pull them. Most of the field guns varied from 3 to 10 pounders. The Sikh artillery was characterised by extensive indigenous production, the important centres for manufacture and repair being at Lahore, Amritsar, Wazirabad and Kashmir and their dependence on imports was negligible in comparison to that of the Marathas.

Ranjit Singh recruited his army from all castes and creeds though Sikhs were particularly given preference and additional facilities. There were no well defined rules and regulations for promotion but it was based on merit. Ranjit Singh was generous to those who displayed great courage in face of the enemy. Discipline in the army was rigidly enforced. Severe punishments were meted out for dereliction of duty.



The Sikh camps were free from many of the evils. During march public and private property were carefully respected. Troops on the march were not allowed to scatter themselves or their animals in the cultivated fields. There was no definite

age limit for retirement. The sikh army was never regularly paid.

The Sikhs were by nature a hardy and tough race. Ranjit Singh introduced the system of regular review and parade of his troops so that they were fit and ready to take the field. Sikh army was not uniformly dressed. There were different dresses and weapons. In fairness to Ranjit Singh, it must be conceded that he had already thought of modernising his army and he already had troops trained on European lines as far back as 1807.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died on June 27, 1839. He was perhaps the most able and strong ruler that had ever adorned the thorne of Lahore. But after his death things did not move on the right path. His successors were inefficient and lacked statesmanlike qualities. The last king was Maharaja Dalip Singh. After the second Sikh war, he was dethroned by the British who annexed the Punjab in 1849, ending an empire most ingloriously which was founded on the glory and strength of their religion and also the people.

LESSON NO. 2.4

BATTLE OF ASSAYE (1803 AD)

INTRODUCTION

Battle of Assaye had far reaching implications in which the British developed a healthy respect for the Marathas and also generated within them the realisation that unless the Maratha influence is completely nullified in India it would not be possible for them to achieve their aim in India. With the appointment of Lord Mornington, the British attitude in India moved towards acquisition of territory to further the aim of East India Company.

With the death of Shivaji, the concept of a cohesive force had been dissipated. With the result a confederacy with four power centres was created i.e. Gwalior under Scindia, Indore under Holkar; Baroda under Gaikwad and Poona under Peshwas and Nagpur under Bhonsles. These Maratha rulers had no unity and would often be involved in war conflict amongst themselves. The English who were then a strong power in the south played one Maratha force against another.

After the death of Mahadevrao Narayan in 1795, Daulatrao helped Bajirao to come to power at Poona. Holker did not like Scindia's influence at Poona and inflicted two successive defeats on his forces in 1801. Daulatrao defeated Holker at Indore and then went to war against the Peshwa also. A battle was fought on October 25, 1802 between Holker on one side and Peshwa and Scindia on the other and Holker won the battle.

- (a) Treaty of Bassein :** After the defeat Peshwa Bajirao sought the protection of the English. On December 31, 1802 he signed the treaty of Bassein, according to which the scheme of Subsidiary Alliance was forced upon him and English garrison was to be kept at Poona at the expense of the Peshwa. This was a great diplomatic victory of the English. The treaty broke up the Maratha confederacy on the eve of an inevitable conflict between the English and the Maratha confederacy.
- (b) Initial Developments :** Alarmed by the treaty of Bassein, Daulatrao Scindia and Raghujji Bhonsle did try to form a Maratha coalition. However, Yashwantrao Holker stood aloof. Once again, a country divided was to fall prey to clever forces. The introduction of a Resident supported by an English force, at the courts of the Maratha princes, who were forced to sign the Subsidiary Alliance, was a master-stroke, as it enabled the English to control and influence all their moves. After the departure of Bajirao, Holker placed Raghunathrao's son on the Peshwas 'Gaddi', while this was being done the English collected their forces to attack on Poona. Two contingents were positioned at strategic points. Colonel Wellesley with 11000 men was to advance from Mysore and Col. Stevenson with 7000 men from the side of the Nizam's dominions. These were to form a junction and then to advance to Poona. While these armies were settling affairs at Poona, General Lord Lake, the commander-in-chief was ordered in June 1803 to prepare for an offensive against Scindia who was considered to be a constant source of danger to the

English designs in north India.

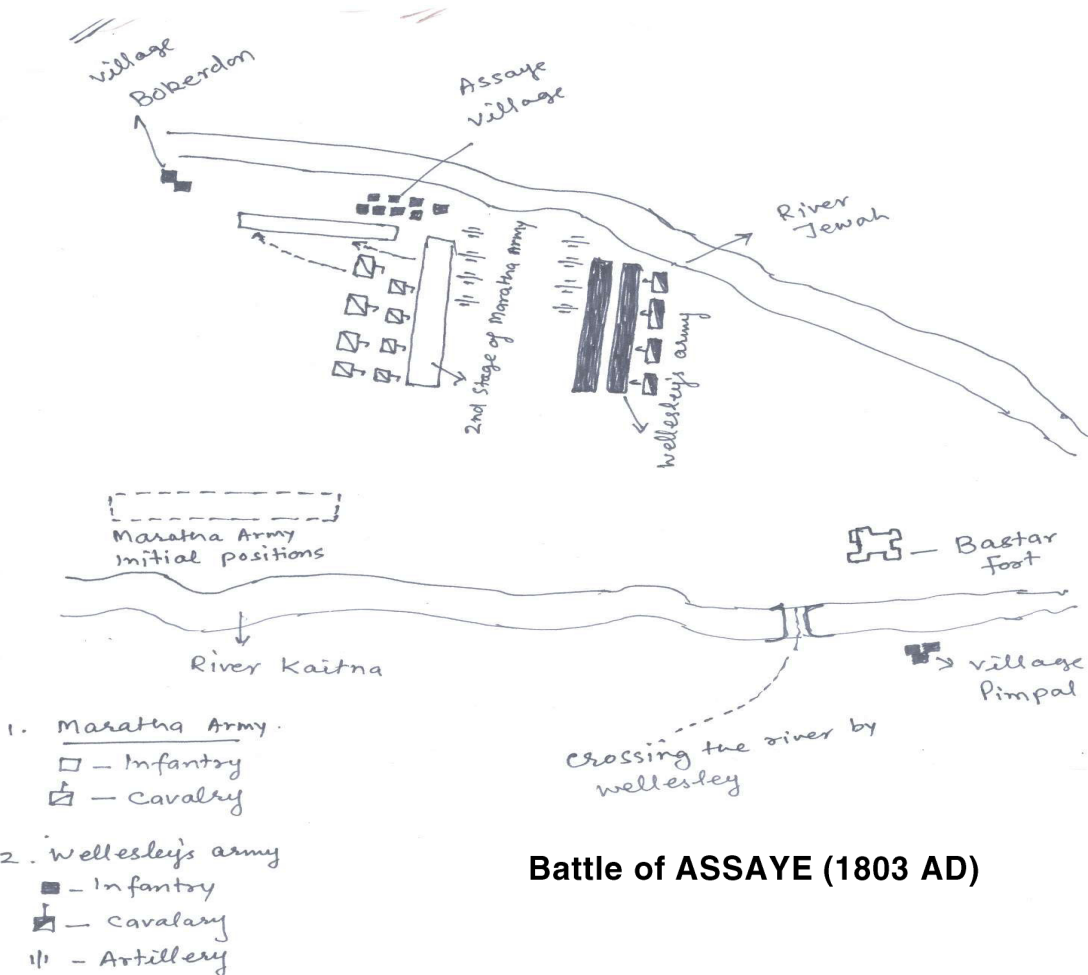
Scindia and Bhonsle had in all about one lakh men under arms of which about 30000 were trained on the European patterns. About 10000 infantry and 40000 cavalry alongwith some guns were available to them in Central India.

- (c) **The Basic strategy of British to defeat Marathas :** Wellesley's basic principle in tackling the Marathas was never to let the Maratha raiders remain undisturbed, never to attack them when they were holding a strongly defended position to force them on to move and to strike them when thrown into disorder. The way he made the war preparations was a classical example for all times to come. He made Ahmednagar his fortified depot for food and munitions, organised the famous Mysore bullock teams and pontoons of copper sheet barrels.

On the other hand, Lake was a dashing man of great personal courage. Quite often he personally led the charges of his infantry. He had a simple way of dealing with his enemies, that of moving straight forward and attacking them wherever he found them.

- (d) **The Battle :** Assaye was a very decisive battle in the sense that it decided the issue with the Marathas in South-Western India. General Wellesley was appointed to command all operations against Sindia. Six armies were positioned at different places. Wellesley had two regiments of European Infantry, one regiment of European Cavalry, and five thousand native cavalry. The Maratha army had about 10000 infantry and 30000 cavalry.

Sindia was caught unawares. He had made no preparations. He planned to fight away from his dominion into the Nizam's territory. He ordered the cavalry to move ahead. The infantry and guns were to follow behind. Wellesley succeeded in occupying the Ahmednagar fort on August 11 and made a base there. He marched out of Ahmednagar on August 18 and crossed the river Godavari on August 22. His intention was to move to Aurangabad and form a junction with Col. Stevenson On 21 September intelligence was received that Marathas were camping near Bokurdon village. On this information, Stevenson moved on the west and Wellesley on the east. They made a plan to attack Marathas on September 24. On 23rd Wellesley found himself too near the Marathas.



Battle of ASSAYE (1803 AD)

Wellesley examined the Maratha deployment very attentively. He immediately perceived that their weakest point was their right wing, resting on the river Kaitna, because that also formed their line of retreat. Wellesley also noticed that the Marathas had not chosen their ground carefully as their huge numbers were cramped in the limited space between the river Kaitna and Jewah and the resultant lack of maneuverability was likely to place them in a disadvantageous position. His plan was simple. His own right wing was to make only a demonstration, while the left wing was to attack the Maratha right wing vigorously.

On arrival Wellesley discovered that his information was incorrect. The Maratha right wing with its cavalry at Bukurdon, extending for six miles up to Assaye on the left where the infantry and guns were positioned. Having formed in battle formation, he advanced as planned. During this initial move there was some confusion and Wellesley committed a mistake. The 14th Regiment, nearest the guns on the right also moved along with the advancing column and exposed that flank. On seeing this, Marathas opened fire with all their guns and charged with their horse. The

initial English attack was thus broken and they suffered heavy casualties. As soon as the situation was stabilised, Wellesley ordered his left flanks to advance towards the centre of Maratha positions and timed this with a simultaneous charge from the centre. There was a heavy fighting and the Marathas were forced back slowly but steadily across the river. This gave the shaken right wing time to recover. In the meantime, Wellesley had himself led the attack on the Marathas right wing with his left and center. The British infantry once again proved its superiority and steadily drove the Marathas into the river Jewah.

The Marathas were forced to cross the Jewah and started to reform their ranks. Wellesley was not the one to let it happen. The British Cavalry charged them across the river and dispersed them. The remainder of Maratha cavalry was still intact. The British cavalry rushed forward before the Marathas could rally together and hastened their retreat. The Maratha cavalry was then taken up which also retreated without seriously fighting.

Casualties : Assaye was, in fact, a general's battle. Wellesley carried it almost single handedly with his brilliant plan based on the Marathas poor choice of ground. His casualties were heavy : 198 Europeans and 230 sepoys killed; and 1108 men in all wounded. The Marathas lost about 500 killed and wounded and they also lost 98 guns. Assaye will also be remembered as one of the few battles of the British in India in which the cavalry played a significant role.

Conclusion : Wellesley's plans in this battle were not well conceived and his deployment was faulty which cost him such heavy casualties. Stevenson had no knowledge of the changed plan. In actual fact, he did not arrive at Assaye until the battle was over. Wellesley could not arrange pursuit of the broken enemy as he had no reserves. His medical arrangements were also defective. However, he showed remarkable presence of mind and ability to take quick decisions in the face of grave danger and heavy reverses. It is to be noted that not a single European officer or soldier was either killed or wounded on the Maratha side. Most of Sindia's regular battalions fought under great handicaps by the withdrawal and defection of the European officers. The Maratha army was thus a force with no commanders. In the final analysis it would be only fair to state that better generalship coupled with intrigue carried the day. The result of the battle of Assaye was one more step by the British to seal the fate of the Maratha confederacy.

Suggested Readings

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| B.K. Majumdar | : | The Military System in Ancient India. |
| J.N. Sarkar | : | Military History of India. |

BATTLE OF CHILLIANWALA, 1849 AD

INTRODUCTION

The British had managed to win at Ferozeshah and Sobraon. It was a great victory for the British forces. The Sikh army lay shattered and scattered and the way to Lahore lay open for the British forces. The battle was won on 10 February 1846. On February 13, the British forces were at Kasur and on 20th they had entered Lahore. After the Lahore treaty, signed on 11 March 1846, there was generally peace and tranquility in Punjab. Under the provisions of the treaty, the sikh army was to be reduced to 20000 infantry and 12000 cavalry and there was to be no artillery. The Governance was to be under a council of Regency. A British Resident was to be appointed to exercise control over the council of Regency, plus act as the mouth piece of the British Government in India. In addition, British troops were to remain in Lahore until the end of 1847.

(a) Causes and Initial Developments : On the other hand, the Sikh people and soldiers did not take long to realise that those were contrived victories (Ferozeshah and Sobraon) in which treachery had played an important part. Hence they had reasons to consider themselves as beaten but not subdued. Meanwhile the imprisonment and exile of Rani Jindan provoked popular discontent. The British had also sensed that unless the Sikhs were beaten fairly and squarely, the embers of rebellion would not be stamped. Dalhousie was, therefore, looking for accuses belli and it was provided by the defection of Chattar Singh and Sher Singh and the rebellion of Mulraj in Multan on 18 April 1848. While the British dithered, the revolt spread. Finally, British forces defeated him in the battle of Suddosom on July 1, 1848. Eventually Multan was beseiged but the seige had to be raised in September. This failure to capture Multan, with the Sikhs already smarting under the defeat at Sobraon and the subsequent treaty of Lahore, was possibly the main cause of the Sikhs rising once again against the British. Sher Singh who had accompanied the British forces to Multan, finding the British incapable, atleast at that time, to recapture Multan defeated and raise a banner of revolt. Infact, the father of Sher Singh had already initiated hostilities in the northern Punjab which Sher Singh now joined. By beginning of November 1948, Multan was still holding out and the Western provinces were in a state of revolt. By 3 January 1849, Attock had also been captured by the rebels. Then Peshawar fell.

The British desire to annex Punjab through a single pitched battle could not be fulfilled immediately. Chillianwala turned out to be one of the most hard-fought battles in the Sikh wars. Dalhousie could hardly conceal his dispair, disgust and

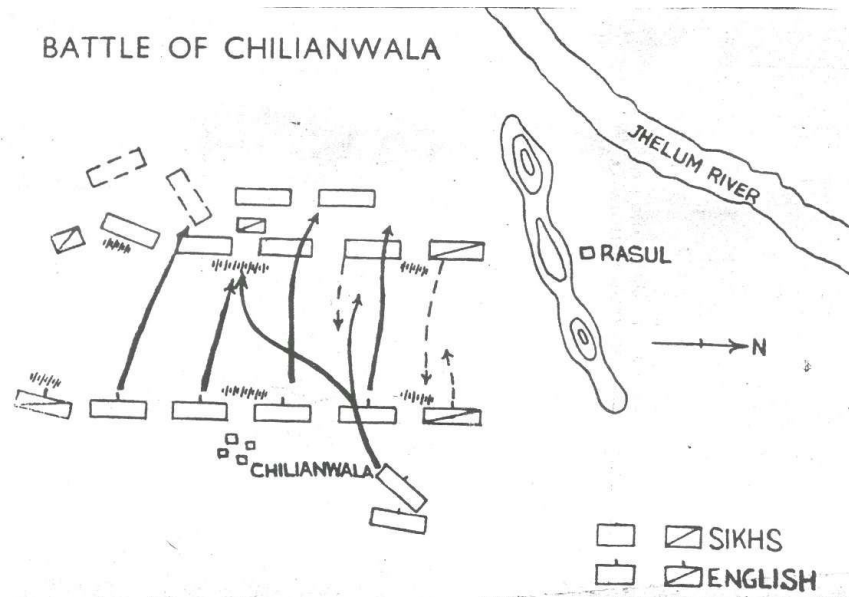
vexation at the conduct of the commander-in-chief Gough. There was great consternation in England and it was even decided to send Charles Napier to command the Indian army. Malleson says, "No British general ever fought a battle so badly as Lord Gough fought Chillianwala. It was, throughout, a day of blunders."

(b) The Battle : Earlier, in the battle of Ramnagar, which was primarily a cavalry action, the Sikhs did not gain much except that they managed to cross the river. Sher Singh won the day and inflicted heavy losses on the English. On the other hand, Gough had also obtained an advantage over his adversary by forcing them across the Chenab.

Lord Gough crossed the river on December 18 and joined General Thackwell's forces camped at Helah. On the other hand, after the fall of Attock, Chattar Singh was now free to reinforce the main Sikh army. So, Lord Gough decided to settle the score with Sher Singh before the junction of father and son took place. He advanced forward on January 12 and camped at Dinghi, east of Chillianwala. Here he received information about the Sikh positions and made out his plans. He decided to turn the left flank of the Sikhs lying on Rasul village in an echelon attack from the north and then roll them down towards the south.

As he advanced forward on the morning of January 13, 1849 he found the Sikhs deployed in an extended line in the plains of Chillianwala. The right wing was in front and about two miles away from village Chillianwala under Sardar Atar Singh. There was a long gap between the Sikh right wing and their center. Ideally, the British should have driven into the gap so as to sever the two wings and then roll them up in opposite direction. But he did not. The Sikh forces numbered 23000 men and horses and 62 guns which were deployed in the front. Sher Singh decided to force a battle. Even though the British army was out of his range he opened fire. Gough had no alternative but to give battle. General Campbell was on the left wing and Sir Walter Gilbert on the right with reserves behind on the right under Brigadier Penny. The British forces numbered 12000 men and horses alongwith 60 guns. The moment gun battle started, Lord Gough changed the earlier plan and ordered a frontal attack through the high shrub and jungle in front.

However, due to the jungle ahead and broken ground, Division commander moved forward with the left Brigade, instructing the Right Brigade to advance independently. Pennyquick advanced more rapidly till he came up to a line of thick shrub. The Sikhs still under the cover of high ground ahead of them kept on pouring heavy artillery fire causing heavy British casualties. The British kept on advancing and after some initial confusion charged the Sikh positions and managed to pierce their lines. The Sikhs then launched their counter attack and there was heavy fighting around the guns, till at last the British Brigade (Penny's Brigade) gave away and started retreating.



On the right wing, General Gilbert advanced on his front supported by the Cavalry Brigade and horsed artillery. The Sikh cavalry made a few dashing charges in which the commander of the English cavalry brigade was killed and Sikhs managed to capture some guns. The British were unable to make any further advances. The cavalry brigade was broken and defeated. Lord Gough then ordered the reserve brigade to move forward. Re-inforced by fresh troops, Campbell and Gilbert charged the Sikh positions and managed to dislodge them. It was then getting dark and a decision was taken to withdraw from the hard won positions for the night towards the rear. As darkness fell the British retired to Chillianwala while the Sikhs evacuated the positions and retreated to Rasul and Tupai.

On the extreme right, Pope's cavalry brigade launched an attack but failed miserably. Simultaneously, Gough launched his reserves. Eventually caught from different directions the Sikhs pulled back in disorder. While the Sikhs were able to recover a large number of their dead and wounded as well as their guns, the British, in a state of exhaustion were in no position to pursue the withdrawing Sikhs. The British formations got seriously dislocated in traversing through the jungle.

Conclusion : Chillianwala was 'one of the hardest fought and most disastrous engagements ever fought on Indian soil', says the official report. The British casualties in killed and wounded were 2446. "No British general ever fought a battle so badly as Gough fought Chillianwala. It was, throughout, a day of blunders." This is the last battle that the Sikhs won. The English also claimed victory at the battle. The Commander-in-Chief was suspended and Sir Charles Napier was sent to replace him.