

ALEXANDER THE GREATS INDIAN CAMPAIGN DID HIS TROOPS REFUSE TO GO FURTHER?

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Alexander the Great entered India in early 326 BC. He attacked Massaga destroyed the town killed most of the inhabitants along with the 7000 Indian mercenary's who had surrendered. The same fate befell Bazeira and Ora. Alexander's losses did not amount to more than 500 Macedonian killed.

Alexander defeated Raja Porus in June 326 BC with ease, on the banks of the river Hyphasis (Jhelum). Raja Porus was wounded in the shoulder, he surrendered to Alexander, losing 12000 soldiers killed and 9000 taken prisoner. His elephants and war chariots were also lost to Alexander. The Macedonian losses were only 1000 killed.

The battle of Sangala ended with 17000 Indians killed, thousands wounded and many more taken prisoner, 300 war chariots and 70 elephants were also taken. The Macedonian casualties were 500 killed out of which 150 were Macedonian and Greek, 350 Indian allies, 1200 wounded.

Alexander after this victory moved further to reach the limits of the former Persian Empire. To establish his authority over all that once belonged to Darius, the limits of which the Macedonians and Greeks knew as the Hyphasis (river Beas) India. This being the Indus and its tributaries. India for them was the Indus valley. The name India and Indus was given by the Greeks. This boundary was on the Hyphasis (Beas).

In the dry season there are boat bridges on the main rivers but during the monsoon the rivers are swollen and the width of some at times is over a mile, hence the boat bridges are dismantled. If this is not done then the boat bridge would be washed away by force of the river. Even the boat bridge at Attock on the Indus was always dismantled despite the Mughals constructing stone masonry pillars in the middle of the river to anchor the boat bridge, which was used upto 1882. The pillars still stand firm after years of use and floods in the Indus. When the bridges are dismantled a few ferry boats were used to carry people and goods across the rivers.

The Hyphasis (Beas) certainly could not have been bridged, any boat bridge existing before the Macedonians arrival would have been dismantled and boats taken to the left bank. Forging the river was out of the question. There were only two options left for the army one to build rafts and boats to cross which would take months or wait till the monsoon was over and water decreased to allow a boat bridge to be built or effect a crossing by fording which would have been extremely difficult due to swollen river. The question is why did Alexander arrive at the Hyphasis (Beas) knowing he could not cross his army for next two months?

It is here stated by Arrian and others that the Macedonian army was unwilling to go any further. That they were exhausted, uniforms torn and had not seen their families for over five years and were desperate to go home. It is also commonly said that the army did not want to face the Nanda army which Curtius records comprised of 2,00,000 infantry, 20,000 cavalry, 2000 four horsed chariots, and 3000 elephants.

A similar situation occurred at Zadracata, the army hearing of the death of Darius, thought the war was over and were celebrating, packing their equipment

to go home. Alexander addressed the troops saying "I intend to dismiss the Thessalian's just as I have already dismissed the Greeks. They are our allies in the pan-Hellenic League and their task is complete. 'No, men! My veterans of so many battles! My friends:. To the East the rebel satraps are preparing a counter attack, they have assembled on army of thousand and thousands. Our return journey, after having accomplished such glorious feats, will be transformed into a catastrophe. Is this what you want"? ' I will not detain you any longer – those who wish to leave may leave now, with honour and with my gratitude, but you must know that even if you should all abandon me now to return to Macedonia, I will go on forward anyway with my Companions until my undertaking is complete, and if necessary I will do it alone!'. The troops finally shouted ' Your orders Sir!'

The Nanda dynasty was born in Sin which Hindu social opinion could not tolerate. The Avasyakasutra (B.690) describes the Nunda king as "Be gotten of a barber" (Napitadasa). Chandragupta himself reported to Alexander whilst he was in Taxila that Nanda was "hated by his subjects". Alexander would have no difficulty in routing a hated king and his army.

Alexander was constantly rotating and sending back troops who were old and tired and receiving fresh reinforcements. After the battle of Gaugamala he asked all those who wanted to go home could do so. He relieved the strong Greek contingent.

On reaching the Oxus he had his Veterans assembled before his tent and announced that he was sending them back, and their places would be taken by younger re enforcement coming to join the army.

At Kurushkkat on the river Jaxartes he dismissed the Thessalian veterans and would keep the youngest, who would come with the latest reinforcements.' Three Thessalian cavalry battalions were to be replaced with 2000 Persian horsemen trained in the Macedonian manner. Alexander also announced that he was recruiting 30000 Persian to be trained to re enforce the army.

How could Alexander allow his troop to refuse to go any further and agree to turn homewards. He as he did at Zadracrata could have addressed his troop and said that 20000 fresh Macedonian and Greek troops with new weapons, equipment and medicines were on their way to join the army, he would raise Indian allied troops and train them by Macedonians, as such all those who wanted to return may do so and that even if he was alone he would continue forward. Very few would have stepped forward for returning home to the shamed all the way to Macedonia.

Alexander divided the army into twelve groups to build twelve gigantic very high stone alters, each one in honour of the twelve gods of Olympus. This was done to mark their furthest advance in India and to establish the Eastern most limits of the former Persian Empire.

The army marched back to the Hydraspes (Jhelum) to sail down to the Indus and the sea. At the Hydraspes Alexander and his Admiral Nearchus stood on a high point, they could see the army marching – now as splendid as it had been when they left Macedonia. (They were not in torn uniforms, unshaven and exhausted soldiers as was being said of them at the river Hyphasis (Beas)).

On the confluence of the Hydaspes (Jhelum) with the Acesines (chenab) the 20000 Macedonian and Greek troops joined up with the army. Close to entering Sindh Alexander divided his army and half under the Command of Craterus he sent taking the route to Arachosia, and Drangiana to reach Alexanderia of Arachosia to restore order in the regions if required.

Alexander had reached the limits of the former Persian Empire in Egypt by marching through the desert for days to reach Oasis of Ammon, Bokhara, Samarkand and finally the Hyphasis (Beas) in India to establish his rule and conquest. He confined himself within these limits and boundaries. He did not turn back due to fear of the Nanda army because he had smashed the Persian Empire with ease, nor due to refusal of his troops to go further who in any case on return journey had to fight a difficult battle at Multan against the Mallians, in which Alexander was struck by javelin lay seriously wounded and surrounded by his attackers, then his huge Molossin dog named Perits (used for hunting lions) came to his rescue by driving off the attackers in the process a javelin was flung at him which pierced his ribs of which he died, giving his life for Alexander. He was forced to stay in the area for over two months to recover.

Had the Macedonian troops show their intent not to go any further and return home, then they would have taken the safe route back on which they had come, the road which was under Macedonian control and not gone into the unknown down the Indus. At the mouth of the Indus a tsunami struck Alexander fleet and 1500 of his men were drowned, hundreds of boats were destroyed and many

more damaged. The army camped for twenty days on the bank of the Indus to repair the damaged boats and give time for healing wounds.

Through the Makran coast and Gedrosian desert they suffered heavy casualties from the weather, terrain, lack of water and supplies. Alexander lost more soldiers on this journey than in all the battles fought in India. If Alexander's army refused to go further into the unknown, then they could certainly have refused to march back home through the worse unknown.

The Indus and beyond at this stage was unknown to the Macedonians. They thought it was the tributary of the Nile and going down it they would emerge finally at Alexandria in Egypt. Soon they were told this was not so.

On return from India at Opis 30000 well trained Persian joined the army, they were called the "Successors". Alexander, decided to send home all the veterans, invalids and wounded under command of General Craterus. There was near revolt, they did not want to go home. On being promised to be given full wages for the rest of their lives, that they agreed to leave.

Alexander was not going back to Pella in Macedonia but was going to make Babylon the capital of his Empire.

Had Alexander led a demoralized, tired and exhausted army which had refused to go any further, he would have found rebellion and uprisings against him from the recently conquered lands. He returned in triumph as The King of the largest Empire that existed.

