

ALEXANDERS THE GREATS INDIAN CAMPAIGN BATTLE OF THE HYDASPES AGAINST RAJA PORUS.

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By the end of May 326 Raja Porus (Poru) had assembled a large army consisting of approx 30000 infantry, 4000 cavalry, 300 war chariots, 200 war elephants on the left bank of the river Hydaspes (Jhelum) near Kshatriya (Bhera) to give battle to Alexander who was on his ownward march into India to claim the former satrapies of the former Persian Empire, though Persian control over them had been lost for over many years, even then there was a strong Indian cavalry contingent in the Persian army fighting on the right flank against Alexander at Gaugamela. Alexanders army consisted of approx 6000 cavalry, 24000 infantry, though some Indian sources put this figure at double the strength which could be unlikely.

Porus's army for all reckoning was formidable and weapons and equipment superior to the Macedonian. The chariots, elephants apart, the infantry was equipped with a bow the height of a man, the string of which had to be pulled preferably by both hands, with one bare foot on the ground and the other bare foot holding the bow, which when shot carried the arrow with greater force and distance than the Macedonian's. The Indian cavalry horses were smaller, leaner and faster than that of the Macedonian's but during a head on charge tended to slightly shy away.

In any case, impressive as Porus's army was it was untrained, had not seen battle nor ever put together as a fighting force under the command of its various Commanders or Chiefs. They wore no armour or helmets.

However Porus instead of denying Alexander crossing of the Hydaspes (Jhelum) chose to select the battlefield, leveling the ground for his chariots. Darius the Persian King had done the same , rather than block Alexander on the river Tigris he selected a plain area at Gaugamela, half a days march from the Tigris, leveled the ground for his scythed chariots. Alexanders army forded the Tigris without any opposition.

When the battle started at Gaugamela, the 200 Persian scythed chariots led the charge, the Macedonian's phalanxes on trumpets being sounded opened gaps through which the scythed chariots rumbled through killing and wounding many Macedonian's. The Macedonians during this process aimed to kill the charioteers and also drove the chariots out of the battle. There were only 15 elephants with the Persian army. Darius not only lost the battle but the Persian Empire to a well trained, battle hardened Macedonian army. Alexander was striving to kill Dairus. He got close and hurled a javelin at him but missed. Darius turned his Chariot and fled the battlefield. Killing Darius would have ended the war in Persia. Alexander's losses were only 2000 killed, whilst the Persian army was massacred.

Alexander did not have any chariots nor used elephants against Porus, through he had collected 13 on the right bank of the Indus and was presented 25 by the ruler of Taxila. His reliance was on cavalry, infantry of archers, slingers sword bearers and spearmen, above all discipline, training and battle experience gained by defeating imperial armies. His army wore helmets, body armour and shield nearly 4 feet 6 inches in height. The Phalanx along with the Companion cavalry were his strength.

Porus seems not to have bothered to collect all the boats on the river and bring them to the left bank, post sentries up and down stream of the river nor employed detachments of cavalry to patrol and attack any elements attempting to ford the river. He seems not to have made efforts to have his men to observe and harass Alexander's camp and its movements.

Alexander was certainly not going to cross the Hydaspes (Jhelum) in front of Porus's army for fear of being attacked in the process. Porus it seems wanted Alexander to cross the river and fight as the Persian King Darius had wanted him to do at Gaugamela. Alexander moved up stream of the river Hydraspes (Jhelum) where a ford was found and crossed the river with bulk of his army undetected. It had rained a day earlier making the crossing difficult.

The Macedonians had experience in river crossings. They crossed the Nile on a bridge of boats, the Euprates on a boat bridge, Tigris they forded, the Oxus and Jaxartes on a path way made of skin bags filled with straw, the skins coming from the tents of the army. The Indus they crossed by a boat bridge and the Hydaspes (Jhelum) they forded.

Porus learning that Alexander had crossed the river, sent out his son with 1000 cavalry to see if it was a Macedonian detachment in force or Alexander with his army. On contact being made, the Macedonians overwhelmed this small force and killed Porus's son. Bulk of Porus's army by now would have been demoralised.

Anyway Porus lined up his army for battle. He seems not to have used the river to his advantage by securing his left flank next to the river which would help and

prevent the Macedonian's from turning his left flank. Porus put his chariots in front, behind them the 200 elephants, infantry behind, the cavalry on both flanks.

To the disadvantage of Porus rain had made the leveled site for the battle soggy. The heavy war chariots could not move at the speed required of them and also were getting stuck in the mud. The Macedonians Phalanxes opened gaps forcing the chariots to go through and as at Gaugamela took a heavy toll of the charioteers. The chariots were out of battle, where as Porus was relying on them to break the Phalanxes. The elephants like wise went through the gaps of the Phalanxes and were showered with arrows and spears, the Mahouts being the prime target. The elephants in pain and agony and no one to control them, many turned back to trample their own infantry. In the years to follow the saying was coined "Porus kay Hati", actually meaning Porus's elephants were killing both friend and foe and also meaning liabilities. Here too Alexander tried his best to get near Porus to kill him but failed. Had he succeeded the battle would have ended there and then.

The infantry of Porus fared no better. The Indian bow which would have created havoc could not be fully pulled because of the bare foot on the ground would slip. The other bare foot put pressure to hold the bow when the string was pulled. The battle was over in about 8 hours with heavy losses to the army of Porus and very few to Alexander. Porus's losses were 12000 killed, 9000 taken prisoner, all the elephants and chariots fell to Alexander. The Macedonian losses were only 1000 killed.

Porus stood seven feet tall. He was wounded in the right shoulder despite wearing a very finely made shining steel mailed armour. The Macedonian army fought

with precision, the front rank fighting for a few minutes, then stepping back, their place taken by fresh troops standing behind in the phalanxes. The Indians on the other hand would become a melee soon after the battle started and exhaust themselves. Command and control would also collapse.

Unlike Darius who fled from the battle at Gaugamela and was later killed by Bessus who was Governor of Bactria. Porus surrendered, was reinstated and on Alexanders departure from India given power to rule his domains in India under a Macedonian commander.

It is surprising the local Indian Rajas and Kings made little effort to unite or block small invading armies using its rivers as obstacles. Such armies romped in India to the extent that the Mughal King Hamayun entered Delhi to reclaim his throne unopposed with only 5000 cavalry. (2000 of his own and 3000 of Behram Khan).