

Rohilla War, Causes, Course, British Role, Governor-General

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The Rohilla War was a conflict fought in northern India between the **Rohillas** of Rohilkhand and the combined forces of the **Nawab of Awadh** and the **British East India Company**. The war began when the Rohillas failed to pay money they had promised to the Nawab for military help. As a result, the Nawab, with British support, attacked them. The Rohillas were defeated, and their region came under the control of Awadh. This war is often seen as an example of how the British started interfering in Indian politics for their own benefit.

About Rohillas

- The **Rohillas were Afghan (Pashtun) settlers** who migrated to India in the early 18th century during the decline of the Mughal Empire, when central authority had weakened and many regional powers were emerging.
- They settled in a fertile and strategically important region in present-day Uttar Pradesh, which later came to be known as Rohilkhand, covering areas like Bareilly, Rampur, and nearby regions.
- Over time, the **Rohillas became powerful chiefs** and established their own independent rule, taking advantage of the **weakening Mughal control**.

- Their society was organized under various leaders, among whom **Hafiz Rahmat Khan** was the most prominent and influential during the time of the Rohilla War.

Rohilla War Background

- The **18th century in India** was a period of political instability marked by the **decline of the Mughal Empire** and the rise of regional powers such as the Marathas, Nawabs, and various Afghan groups like the Rohillas.
- The **Marathas were expanding rapidly** into northern India, posing a serious threat to smaller regional powers, including the **Rohillas of Rohilkhand**.
- The **Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-Daula**, was also trying to expand his territory and strengthen his political position in the region.
- The British East India Company, after gaining power in Bengal, was looking for opportunities to extend its influence into other parts of India by forming alliances and intervening in regional disputes.

Rohilla War Immediate Causes

- The Rohillas, feeling threatened by the **Marathas**, sought military help from Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Awadh, to protect their territory.
- **A formal agreement** was made in which the Nawab agreed to help the Rohillas fight against the Marathas in return for a payment of Rs. 40 lakhs.
- The Nawab fulfilled his part of the agreement by helping the Rohillas successfully defend against the Maratha threat.
- However, after the Marathas were driven away, the **Rohillas failed to pay the promised amount**.
- This refusal was seen by the Nawab as a breach of trust and provided him with a justification to attack Rohilkhand.

Role and Motives of the British

- **Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal**, agreed to support the Nawab of Awadh by providing British troops for the campaign against the Rohillas.
- The **British East India Company was paid a large sum of money** in return for supplying military assistance, showing that their involvement was driven by financial motives.
- Apart from money, the British had strategic reasons for supporting Awadh, as they wanted to **create a strong buffer state** between their territories and the expanding Maratha power.
- Supporting the Nawab also allowed the British to increase their influence over Awadh and gradually bring it under their control.
- This decision later became controversial, as critics argued that the British were essentially **“selling” their army for profit** and interfering in matters that did not directly concern them.

Rohilla War Course

- In early **1774**, the combined forces of the **Nawab of Awadh and the British East India Company** marched into Rohilkhand to attack the Rohillas.
- The Rohilla forces, led by **Hafiz Rahmat Khan**, prepared to defend their territory but were at a disadvantage compared to the well-organized and better-equipped combined army.
- The decisive battle took place at **Miranpur Katra in April 1774**, where intense fighting occurred between the two sides.
- During the battle, **Hafiz Rahmat Khan was killed**, which severely weakened the morale and leadership of the Rohilla forces.
- After this turning point, the Rohilla resistance collapsed, leading to their complete defeat.

Rohilla War Consequences

- After the defeat, most of **Rohilkhand was annexed by the Nawab of Awadh**, significantly increasing his territory and power.
- A large number of **Rohillas were forced to flee their homeland** and cross the Ganges River, leading to displacement and suffering.
- The British later intervened again and **established a small Rohilla state at Rampur** as a dependent or **“protected” state**.
- **Faizullah Khan, a Rohilla chief**, was recognized as the **Nawab of Rampur** under British supervision, ensuring that the region remained under indirect British control.

Second Rohilla War (1794)

- After the death of Faizullah Khan in 1793, a succession dispute broke out among his heirs regarding who would rule Rampur.
- This internal conflict provided another opportunity for British intervention in the region.
- In **1794**, the British fought against the Rohillas again and defeated them, further strengthening their authority and control over the region.
- This second conflict confirmed the declining power of the Rohillas and the increasing dominance of the British in northern India.

Criticism and Impeachment of Warren Hastings

- Warren Hastings faced strong criticism in Britain for his role in the Rohilla War, especially for allowing **British troops to be used in what was seen as an unjust and profit-driven conflict**.
- His critics accused him of supporting the Nawab of Awadh purely for money and ignoring the suffering of the Rohillas.
- These actions became part of the charges during his **impeachment trial in the British Parliament**.
- Although the trial lasted several years and included serious allegations, Hastings was eventually acquitted and declared not guilty.

Rohilla War Significance

- The Rohilla War marked an **important stage in the expansion of British political and military influence in India**, as it showed their willingness to interfere in regional conflicts for their own benefit.
- It demonstrated the British strategy of using alliances with Indian rulers to gradually gain control over territories without direct conquest initially.
- The war strengthened Awadh in the short term but also made it more dependent on British support, which later led to its loss of independence.
- It highlighted the decline of smaller regional powers like the Rohillas, who could not compete with the combined strength of Indian rulers and the British.

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