

“Warfare in Ancient India”

*Rakshitt C. Bajpai,
Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University*

PHILOSOPHY & INTRODUCTION

Ancient political thinkers considered War as an extension of politics, a fallout of interstate relations. They firmly believed in the application of the well-known upayacatustaya (4 means), which were: -

- *Sama* : conciliation,
- *Dana* : gifts,
- *Danda* : punishment ,
- *Bhed*: discord.

All of them believed in following these principles in order to serve the interest of any state. It was a very good tactic in diplomatic context.

History has presented many evidences corresponding to the fact that none of the intellectual and responsible rulers had ever resorted to force or war to be more precise, conflicts can arise due to various antecedent conditions such as opposing ideologies, scarcity of resources , etc.

The means of War or *Danda* was considered as the last resort and was used only when the other 3 had not been able to achieve the desired outcome. This can also be observed in case of Mahabharata where the Pandavas pleaded for reconciliation and war was depicted as their last resort.

If we observe today’s world even now Diplomacy and Military strength go hand in hand. They are also supported by a third pillar which remains in the shadows of time and is always known by its failure, it’s the pillar of espionage. Same was the condition in ancient India.

War and Military though occupy a back seat in the political arena of ancient India, still, they proved to be very crucial at times and that is the reason which reinforces the historians to explore the dimension of Military Science, Technology and Tactics, which have been changing in the same manner as the other aspects of ancient India like culture, language, etc. Wars have been quoted as “ugly business” by many people and are a fertile ground for a lot of criticism not only today but also in the ancient India.

Despite this espoused aversion to war, the history of India is crowded with various wars. One factors play an important role behind it which is:-

★ The large size of country:

- *Encouraged growth of many tiny kingdoms which led to conflicts.*
- *It was based on the principle of “the ruler with the biggest stick (army) rules the world”.*

- ★ Indian Subcontinent being portrayed as a basket of resources: History stands evidence to the fact that most of the conflicts take place due to the scarcity of resource and revolve around this concept. Same is the case with India.
- ★ Ambition of rulers is also an important factor which contributed to the occurrences of conflicts which was further reinforced by various religious rituals like the *ashwamedha yajna, etc.* This also resulted in the development of an instinct in the rulers to achieve great titles like *Samratha, etc.* and be equated and compared to the god.

One of the unique aspect about the wars and conflicts in the Indian Subcontinent which makes it different from the European context is that the civilian population was left undisturbed and was not involved in any such conflict.

The stagnant structure and system of administration in the army has been one of the major reasons which resulted in the loss of the Indian rulers and gave an edge to the foreign invaders.

CASE STUDY OF WARFARE IN VEDIC AGE

The Indus Valley Civilization met a very tragic end due to the Aryan invasions which took place from the Central Asian region. The Aryans had a better approach towards strategy making and war tactics, it may be due to their religious or cultural beliefs. The famous Aryan god Lord *Indra* is also called as *Purandara* which means the destroyer of the forts. It is said that he destroyed around 90 forts for his *protégé* Divodasa.

The Indo-Aryans were engaged in two types of conflicts. First, they fought with pre-Aryans, and secondly, they fought amongst themselves.

Intra – Tribal conflicts were an everyday affair in the Aryan communities for a long time and that is why the Aryans who did not gained much versatility in warfare, were not able to modernise their equipment.

The Bharatas and Tritsu tribes of Aryan people were the ruling clans and they were assisted and supported by a priest viz. Vasishtha. The Bharata clan was opposed by a host of ten chiefs, five of whom were heads of Aryan tribes and the remaining five were non-Aryans.

The battle that the Bharatas fought with the alliance of ten chiefs is called as the Battle of Ten Kings, it was fought on the banks of river Parushni, coterminous with the river Ravi. The battle eventually gave victories to the Sudas and established the supremacy of the Bharatas.

CASE STUDY OF INVASION OF ALEXANDER & HIS MILITARY STRATEGIES

In the 4th century BC, Greeks and Iranians fought for the supremacy of the world. Under the able leadership of Alexander of Macedonia the Greeks eventually destroyed the Iranian empire. Alexander conquered Asia Minor or Anatolia (includes majority region of modern day Turkey), Iraq and Iran after which he turned over to the Indian sub-continent.

As he was very much attracted by the wealth of this region, the role of famous historian *Herodotus* can't be neglected here who projected India as a wealthy state. Alexander and his large army marched in India through the Khyber Pass in 326 BC. It took him about five

months to reach river Indus, the steep descending gradient and the narrowness can be a reason behind it.

His first major encounter took place with the Ashpasioi (ashvakas), the people inhabiting Alisang Kunar Valley. He subdued them and captured 40,000 men and 2, 30,000 oxen. These oxen were later exported to Macedonia for their use in agriculture.

After subjugating the frontier regions Alexander marched towards Sindhu river where he fought against Porus with the allied support of the rulers of Taxila and Abhisara on the banks of river Jhelum. Alexander after defeating Porus got impressed by his attitude and returned his kingdom and made him an ally.

Even today King Porus is cited whenever one talks about the valiant warriors of India and India's institution of Kingship. The courage displayed him spoke volumes about him.

Alexander could advance as far as the Beas river only and the reasons behind it were:-

- (i) His army had become war-weary and were very tired,
- (ii) The hot and tropical climate of India made them homesick,
- (iii) The Nanda Army greatly outnumbered the army of Alexander, etc.

So, overall the army of Alexander had a lot of potential, they were well motivated and experienced also due to their previous exploits in Iran, Iraq, Anatolia and Kabul. If time had supported Alexander maybe he could have defeated the Nanda army and today we might study something new and different about the Ancient Indian Civilizations.

CASE STUDY ABOUT THE NATURE OF WARFARE DURING THE MAURYAN RULE

The best way to initiate the study about the nature of warfare during the Mauryan rule is to talk about Chandragupta who was the one to found and establish the Mauryan dynasty.

The empire of Chandragupta Maurya covered almost all of India. Saurashtra formed only a part of his kingdom.

Many Historians also tell about his victory against Seleukos, who was a general of Alexander in the western Asian region in 305 BC. Chandragupta owed these victories to his large army which according to the Greek sources included 6, 00,000 infantry, 30,000 horses, 36,000 elephants and 24,000 chariots.

The *Arthashastra* written by Kautilya during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya proved to be an important instrument for administration and coordination of his military forces as well as in other fields such as Economy, Trade, Espionage, etc.

Not many evidences have been found about the military exploits and achievements of Bindusaara, but his son Ashoka did undertake various military campaigns against Taxila, Nepal and the most famous one viz. Kalinga.

Ashoka before the kalinga war believed in a policy of violence, conquest and expansion. It's said that in the Kalinga war 1, 50,000 men were captured, 1, 00,000 men were slain and many

more died due to various other factors. This blood-bath so much hurt him that he abandoned the pursuit of war forever.

The Mauryan dynasty lasted till 187 BC, when Senapati (Commander of Armed Forces) Pushyamitra Shunga killed the last Mauryan ruler.

The Mauryan rule was the first one in the Indian subcontinent to adapt an approach towards modernization of not only military tactics, but, the evolution in the field of espionage can also be seen.

The Arthashastra by Kautilya can be a viable reason behind it. The decline of Mauryan Empire is also due to the standing army they maintained, later rulers like Ashoka who took the policy of tolerance and non-violence did maintain their army well but did not use it much which paved a path for a coup by their general Pushyamitra Shunga.

MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

The sena / bala or the army is one of the most important constituent of any state. Shukryacharya defined the sena/bala as an organized group of men well provided with offensive and defensive weapons. For the proper conduct of war armies were organized in various classes, arms and units. Commanders were appointed to lead the army in the battlefield, which was supported by a coordinated logistics system in order to meet the necessary requirements.

This system which was very prevalent in the ancient India was a crude form of Military Science and the Science of warfare, as time went on it got evolved and today we have professional institutions such as the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun, the United States Military Academy in WestPoint, etc. which are known to produce warriors which are good in both administration and warfare techniques.

CLASSIFICATION OF MILITARY ARMS & CORPS

In the Vedic age the classification of the division of the armed forces was not very precise. The King maintained some of his personal guards and during war time he raised an army based on volunteers.

Since we are talking about the Vedic age, most of the wars and battles were fought among tribes so voluntary participation in war in order to save the tribe, which was their only identity, can act as a driving force to join the armed forces.

The King also called the village contingents from different villages. So in total the army during the Vedic age comprised of three components viz. King's bodyguards, Voluntary people and Village Contingents.

This was also a reason why the Aryans demanded *Shurveeras* or boys from Lord Indra in their prayers as it would strengthen their position and to meet the needs of their military.

Ancient Epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata mention the division of the ground infantry into various arms.

The various types of divisions in the infantry existing in the Ancient Indian Civilizations were:-

(1.) *Maula-Bala* (Hereditary Army)

The Maula-Bala was like a regular army which was maintained at the expenses of the state. The selection into this division was merit based, but the son of an ex-soldier can join the force after the retirement or death of his father. This division enjoyed the sponsorship rendered to them by the state and during peace time they mostly spent their time by being involved in cultural activities and drinking.

The soldiers of the Maula Bala were rated as the best and they were emotionally attached to the king and he in turn was reverential to them.

(2.) *Bhrtya-Bala* (Mercenary Force)

The Bhrtya Bala or the mercenary force was considered the second best in the order of precedence. Being close to the king the bhrtyas were always prepared for war. Linguists like Panini referred to a class of people who depended on arms for their livelihood and inhabited the western parts of India.

The concept of a mercenary force has also been highlighted in the Arthashastra. According to the Arthashastra the Kambojas, Surashtras, Kshatriyas and Shrenis (forces maintained by the different guilds) earned their livelihood through commercial activities and by fighting as mercenaries.

(3.) *Shreni-Bala* (Guild Force)

In the order of precedence the Shreni-Bala occupied the third place yet it was profoundly used by the king and the Shreni-Bala supported the king as both of them had same interests. The Shrenis also occupied an important place in ancient Indian economy. A Gupta inscription tells us about a small army maintained by the guild of weavers which consisted of excellent bow-men which proved to be very beneficial in the encounter with the Hunas invading India from Central Asian region.

(4.) *Mitra-Bala* (Friendly Force)

The Mitra-Bala occupied the fourth order. It comprised of the soldiers supplied by the friendly rulers to fight against a common enemy. The Mitra-Bala were considered dependable as the ruler to whom they were faithful had a common objective with the ruler to whom they were supplied.

(5.) *Dvishad-Bala* (Enemy Force)

The fifth category of dvishad bala included soldiers who were recruited inside the enemy territory or had been enticed to join the army after being deserted by their masters. The main object of this force in war were activities like plundering villages, looting the villages and setting the village and crops on fire. Usually people regarded this force as serpents and dangerous to its masters, but being led by Aryan commanders they were far better than the forest army.

(6.) *Atavi-Bala* (Forest Army)

This army comprising of forest dwellers and led by a non-Aryan commander was considered very inferior among the other wings of infantry. The Varna system was applicable even in the army and this is a very good example for it. It is stated to have comprised of Mlecchhas (meaning barbarians), inhabitants of mountainous regions and the Nishadaas.

As these people usually lived on their loot the rulers were advised to use them cautiously. In this context it's important to quote about the *atavikas* mentioned in the Arthashastra which states that they were a crucial part of the Ancient Indian Warfare.

Caste system and Military service

The Vedic age comprised of three main classes viz. the Brahmanas, the Raajanyas (Kshatriya) and the Vishas (Vaishyas). As we know, the brahmanical class was mostly responsible for the religious duties, the military and administrative functions of the state were carried out by the Raajanya class and the Vishas were the middle class involved in activities like agriculture, trade, etc.

Considering all the facts and authentic evidences like the Rig Veda we can conclude that the main profession of the Kshatriya class was military service and administrative duties.

The Aryan culture and the Rig Veda are excellent sources which can help us to find the connection between Hinduism and the concept of War.

The hymns of the Rig Veda contain many references to the details of the warfare of the time. The bands of attacking Aryans marched with leaders carrying banners. The soldiers on the march sang and shouted both of the victories of their ancestors and of the aid which had been granted by Lord *Indra* and other of the Vedic gods.

In the Epic age the predominance of the Kshatriya class in the military matters was recognized, but, we fail to recognize the contribution of the people from other castes.

The greatest Military thinkers of the age viz. Brahaspati, Shukra and Parashurama belonged to the Brahmanical class.

Great military science teachers like Dronacharya and Krapacharya were also Brahmins. Still, the profession of *Yuddhacharya* (Teacher of Military Science and Warfare) was regarded as very disrespectful for the Brahmins in the *Manusmriti*.

Even Kautilya believed in that the army should constitute only the Kshatriyas and that Brahmin soldiers were not dependable.

The discussion of a Brahmin yielding a weapon has been a hot topic for discussion for a long time.

However, the *Dharmashastra* permits the Brahmins to wield weapons and join the army in evil times when religion and country are in danger.

There were also many great warriors which belonged to the lower casts. For e.g. great archers like Eklavya and Karna

The *Agni Purana* talks about the criteria for the selection of men in the army. It says that men of tall stature with aquiline nose, big eyes, well blended eyebrows, irascible, fond of quarrels, contended, happy and lustful made bold soldiers.

FUNCTIONS OF ARMS & COORDINATION AMONG THEM

Over the centuries Indians also learned about the efficiency of different arms in the battlefield and how to set a proper coordination among them to emerge victorious in their conquests.

This can be backed by the text of *Agni Purana*. According to it the main task of the infantry (*pattikarma*) was to remove the wounded from the battlefield, give weapons to the soldiers and water to the elephants. The sword and shield-bearers protected their own army from the enemy's attacks and also sought to pierce the enemy's array.

The function of archers was to chase the enemy away and provide cover to their soldiers, they were like ancient artillery, whereas, the Chariot Corps (*rathakarma*) was to create terror in the enemy's ranks and also helped in evacuation of seriously wounded soldiers from the battlefield.

The elephant corps were used to break the enemy arrays and during a siege they were used to break into the enemy fort. Cavalry unlike later time was used to secure the supply lines and survey the battle zone. This might be due to shortage of horses that has existed in India.

Mughals and specially Babur can be credited for the introduction of coordinated warfare strategy in India which can be supported by the victories he achieved. He devised an efficient mechanism of initiating a coordinated attack with the proper use of cavalry which was supported by the artillery. But the fact still remains that this was all about the medieval period.

DEVELOPMENT OF VARIOUS ARMS

(1.) *Infantry (Padati-Bala)*

To begin with, man fought on foot. The inhabitants of Indus Valley perhaps knew no other arm which is also speculated by the archaeological discoveries.

Talking about the Vedic age, infantry occupied an important place in the Aryan Army. The Aryan infantry consisted of large number of soldiers from different tribes who were led by the elite class, mounted upon the chariots.

We have also got many evidences which mention about spoke wheeled chariots however they were not that common in India. The seal of Hissar present in modern day Iran projected this type of chariot. Chariots were introduced by Aryans and proved to be very beneficial to them. Many times these chariots also consisted of quivers to accommodate the arrows of an archer.

It is usually observed that people compare two kingdoms or countries by the strength and numbers of their infantry, but still infantry is considered as an inferior part of the army in comparison to the elephant corps, chariots, cavalry, etc.

In context of the above statements there are several examples like, in the 4th century infantry was considered an important part of army. When Alexander invaded India he encountered the

Indian infantries belonging to different kingdoms. Porus, the Indian adversary of Alexander maintained a large army which fought with long bows and carried a buckler made of undressed ox-hide.

Some fought with javelins, but all of them carried broad bladed sword which was about 3 cubits. In close encounters it was wielded with both hands to increase its efficiency and add force to it.

Chandragupta maintained a strong infantry which according to Greek sources consisted of 6 lakh men. The *Arthashastra* also acknowledges the importance of infantry as it can be mobilized very efficiently and can fight in deserts, mountains, forests, inside trenches, etc.

(2.) Chariot Corps (*Ratha-Bala*)

The chariot corps were an important part of the infantry especially during the Aryan Invasions. As a precursor of horse drawn chariot Ox drawn chariots could give mobility and the amount of charge or force which an ox had, it could easily disperse the resisting enemy.

A chariot yoked to a pair of two bullocks and driven by a nude human figure, all in bronze, has been discovered at Daimabad and identified as Harappan, but there is no evidence of it being used as a weapon.

The horse chariot introduced an element of mobility in warfare. These chariots were much faster than the foot soldiers, carry more variety and number of weapons and was designed to give an advantage of height to the person mounting it.

It can be said that introduction of Horses in 2000BC finally revolutionized the chariots into a war machine

In the Vedic Age the chariot warrior performed the task of both warrior and charioteer, it subsequently compromised his security and decreased his ability.

Later on the appointment of a separate charioteer removed this handicap, but this was probably during later Vedic Period as the term “*saarathi*” appears for the first time in the *Brahmanas*.

The charioteer occupied the position on the right side of the chariot, whereas, the warrior sat on the left side of the chariot. There are many other interesting facts related to chariots such as its decoration and armour made of tiger or lion skin.

There were also many large sized chariots which were used by Greeks and pulled by horses, these chariots could accommodate as much as 6 men, but usually they consisted of 3 people viz. one charioteer and two warriors.

The importance of chariots has also been highlighted in the *Arthashastra*. The Superintendent of chariot corps was called *Rathadhyashaka*. Besides leading his men into war he was also responsible to establish factories to manufacture chariots.

(3.) Elephant Corps (*HASTI-BALA*)

The Cambridge History of India says that the elephant appears in the Rig Veda as a wild beast. Yet its effect and use is little heard of during the Aryan period as they had a much faster alternative viz. the chariot.

In fact the reason why use of elephant corps was very limited was because they were very slow, could not be relied upon as it was a huge animal and not a machine, whereas, there were many benefits also, like they are very useful when it comes to breaking the enemy's formation or creating chaos in the enemy forces and breaking through fort walls as described in the Vishnudharmottara Purana.

There have been many instances where elephants have been used as a ride by the archers in Medieval India, especially by the Mughals. According to *Arthashastra*, the focal point in the formation of a battle array was an elephant or a chariot and all the other divisions are to be arranged with reference to it. It can be seen very clearly in the Ajanta paintings and the Saanchi art that the combating elephants were an important division of the military.

(4.) Cavalry (*Ashva-Bala*)

The use of cavalry was not known to the Harappans as horse did not belong to the Indian Sub-Continent region and the Aryans were the ones to introduce it and this was also an important reason for the victory of Aryans over the IVC.

The *Atharva Veda* contains several hymns related to horse. Even in the *Zend Avesta* many Iranian chiefs were named after horses. The Aryans prayed for strong sons (symbol of warriors) and thousands of horses which indicates the importance of cavalry and horses.

Although, the soldiers in cavalry were not provided with riding equipments like saddle, stirrups, etc., but they were armed with two spears and a shield.

The *Arthashastra* also emphasizes the importance of cavalry and also the quality of horses which was much better in Central Asian region. The Junagadh inscription of *Rudradaman* describes cavalry as superior to all other arms.

It has also been found that the Scythians and Sarmatians castrated their horses to make them more efficient in the battlefield. The Cavalry can be seen as a platform for evolution which can be proved by many examples, one such example is that of the introduction of Archers in the cavalry by the Shaka invaders.

Cavalry provided an edge to all the invasions from the Central Asian region as the horses belonged to that area and due to the scarcity of horses in the Indian Subcontinent region the military organizations were not very much aware of them and used them judiciously.

(5.) Navy (*Nau-Bala*)

There are many accounts of the Harappans having trade relations with the West Asian Civilizations, this could have been possible with the help of a naval fleet.

Even in the Vedic age there are many sources which refer to sea voyages, sea faring ships and sea trade.

These fleets were very rudimentary in nature, India gained proficiency in ship building around 4th Century BC. In the Mauryan administration there was a separate department to look after the ship building affairs. There have been many speculations regarding the strength of the Mauryan Navy but there is no authentic source which can be taken into consideration.

The naval arms received better attention in the southern states of India. According to VA Smith “the Tamil states maintained a powerful navy and were visited freely by ships from several civilizations.

However, the *Cholas* earned a lot of glory by dint of their naval might. Even today their Navy is referred as an extraordinary example among other civilizations of their time.

(6.) Air Arm (*VIMAANA-BALA*)

Various Puranas and epics make references to *vimanas* or flying machines. For e.g., in the *Ramayana* there are many references to the famous *Pushpak Viman*.

The *Brihadvimanashastra* which was composed much before the Europeans thought about the concept of an aircraft contains a lot of definitions about this concept of an air craft. The term *viman* consists of *VI* (*bird/sky*) + *mana* (*likeness*), thus referring to something which was like a bird.

Many contemporary historians and authors believe that the whole concept of *vimanas* and air chariots are just poetic fantasies or exaggerations done to manipulate the society which can be considered true to an extent as there are no technical descriptions of these so called flying machines.

In the present state of affairs it's quite difficult to explain and digest the fact of *vimanas* or flying machines in ancient India. Although, it's an undeniable argument and a reinforcing fact that the Indians had visualized the concept of Air Force and Air Warfare around the beginning of the Christian era, some 2000 years before the world could even think about it.

(7.) Treasury (*KOSA*), Counsel (*MANTRA*) and Logistics (*VISHTIKARMA*)

It's a common notion among people that the *KOSAS and MANTRAS* which stayed far away from the battlefield and the bloodshed didn't matter in a war.

However, the *Arthashastra* which is an exemplary work and reference guide to modern day philosophy of administration says something else. According to the *Arthashastra*, a wise king should defeat his enemy through the *Kosas and Mantras*.

It basically means that the king should maintain proper framework of administration in the army for its funding and to tackle matters related to various other issues.

One of the most important aspect of any military campaign are the supplies and reinforcements.

This duty was performed by the *Vishtikarmas*. The need of logistics became crucial due to emergence of large armies. The *Vishtikarmas* procured the necessary ration for the army through a variety of methods like raiding the enemy camp, borrowing them from the nearby villages and inhabitants, carrying them, etc.

MILITARY ADMINISTRATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

(1) Command Structure: If we look at the command structure that existed during the Vedic Age we'll find that the king was the supreme authority and designated to be blessed by the *Indra* (Vedic God). All the important decisions regarding the army were taken by him and also the administrative duties, but as the size of armies grew the concept of *Senapati* (Commander of the Armed Forces) emerged, still the final decision was taken by the king. However, during the Mauryan rule the *Arthashastra* was the main book for all sorts of administration and strategies. According to the *Arthashastra* and various other compilations like the *Agni Purana* and the *Manusmriti* the king needs to maintain a counsel to look into the affairs of military and also that the king should make a decision only after consulting that counsel. The person appointed as the *senapati* was duly consecrated. During the appointment of *Senapati* various facts were taken under consideration, the *Matasya Purana* was one such compilation which consisted of some qualities which were taken into consideration. There were many other sub divisions under the *senapati* which played the roles similar to today's platoon commander.

(2) Pension: Surprisingly, the concept of providing pension to the retired soldiers, families of the soldiers who were killed in action was introduced in the Ancient India. The *Arthashastra* and the *Niti prakashika* are two such sources which put light on them. As mentioned in the *Niti prakashika* even the soldiers who were casualty of war or got disabled in war were provided a pension at a rate of half of their pay.

(3) Defence Production: Supply of arms and ammunition is a very crucial part of any military campaign and many times it has been a decisive factor in many historic battles. In ancient India the Harappan people initiated the defence production which can be proved by the archaeological findings from Harappan sites which include weapons like javelin, arrow, mace, etc.

During the Vedic Age this system got more diversified due to the employment of specific artisans who had their specific duties. For e.g., the *rathakara* was responsible for making chariots, *jayakara* was responsible for making bow-strings, *dhanushkara* was responsible for making bows, etc. Later on in the Gupta Period, there was *Vishnudharmottara Purana* which contained information about defence production.

(4) Salutation System: Not much authentic evidence is available regarding the salutation system followed in ancient India. The *Ramayana* talks about some like *pranama*, *pranipata*, etc. However, it can be said that by the 17th century the military salute was made by bowing and touching the sword with forehead, the source for this is the *Harshacarita Purana* (page 152).

MILITARY RITUALS, CEREMONIES AND HONOURS IN ANCIENT INDIA

Culture is also an integral part of the army since ancient times. Even now the Indian Army has various regiments like the Sikh Regt., The Rajputana Rifles, the Kumaon Regt., the Gorkha Rifles, the Naga Regt., etc. These regiments are not only efficient on the battleground but also have a cultural and religious aspect attached to them which in a manner motivates

them. Similarly in there were many military rituals which were performed in the Vedic age, some of them are:-

VAJAPEYA: This word is a combination of *vaja* meaning drink and *peya* meaning food, so it's interpreted as the drink of strength. It was performed during the Vedic age and was a part of the Aryan culture. The performance of this ritual earned emperor hood (*samrat*) to the ruler. It lasted for 17 days and included three main events viz. the chariot race, mounting of the sacrificial post and besprinkling of the sacrifice. The main motive of the sacrifice was to ensure the safety and sovereignty of the state.

RAJASUYA: Only kings were entitled to this ritual as it was focussed towards the attainment of *adhipatya* (Supremacy) over heaven sky and the earth. Its duration was about two years beginning in the month of *Phalguna* (a period between the months of February and March). In this the king was anointed with holy water and at the end had to drive a chariot driven by four horses towards the north direction.

ASHVAMEDHA: The *ASHVAMEDHA* or horse sacrifice was performed by a king or any ruler with the aim of achieving unending supremacy over the other kingdoms. There are many records of this ritual being performed by the Vedic Aryans in the Rig Veda and many other rulers like the *Pandvas* (Mahabharata), King *Rama* (Ramayana), Samudragupta, Pushyamitra Shunga, etc. who performed this ritual. In this ritual a horse was chosen for the sacrifice and was tied near the sacrificial fire, anointed by the priest and then left to wander with its bodyguards from the cavalry, if it was captured the army performing the ritual had to defeat the army who had caught the horse and release the horse, failure to do so led to defeat and abandonment of the ritual. If the horse returned safely it was anointed by the queen and then tied at the sacrificial post for its sacrifice. There have been many questions about the authenticity of this ritual as thinking practically the diplomatic and military consequences of this ritual would have been devastating.

NIRAJANA: This ritual was performed by the kings and generals. In this ritual the royal emblems, weapons, soldiers, horses and elephants were touched with the holy water for better performance in war and that's why the name *nir + anjana* i.e. water + touch. This ritual has been mentioned in the *Brihathsamita*, *the Agni Purana* as well as the *Arthashastra*.

SHATRU-BALI: This ritual came into the lime light before the beginning of the Christian era, it is said to have been introduced by the *Kushanas* or the *Shakas*. Although it also has some tribal influence. In this ritual, an enemy figure made of rice was cut by the king and offered it to *SKANDA*, the god of war. This ritual is also associated with goddess Durga as she is also called *Mahishasurmandhini* (killer of demon Mahisha).

Talking about gallantry, it has always commanded respect and recognition. In the primitive societies the leadership of the clan or tribe fell upon most brave. Indra, the most distinguished of the braves among the Aryans, became the king and the Commander.

The evolution of regular armies may have, however, demanded elaboration of the system of honours and awards. In the Vedic this was done by granting a share to the soldiers in the loot were some conventions with regard to the disposal of the looted property, and the warriors

claimed a share proportionate to their contribution. To illustrate the point, charioteers were entitled to one-fourth booty.

A share in the loot continued to be an incentive for the till a much later date and in the Agni Purana a ruler is advised tribute the spoils of war among the servants in an equitable manner.

In the epic age the emphasis came to be laid upon the heavenly rewards. This development can possibly be related with the philosophical and religious achievements of the age which reflected attitude of the people.

The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya gallantry awards. It clearly marks “A hundred thousand (panas) thousand for slaying the commander-thousand for slaying the chief of an elephant or a chariot, a thousand slaying the chief of the infantry, the pay in addition to whatever system of military honours and awards beginning of the Christian era. A similar account is given in the *Agni Purana*. Distinguished military service was honoured with land grants and relief in the taxation as mentioned in the *Arthashastra*.

An interesting custom of honouring the gallant is mentioned in the *Hoysala* records. It was the bestowal of ‘*Todar*’, a badge like device which was worn on the left foot, by the ruler on the distinguished soldiers who were promoted to be the life guards of the king. Since it was made of gold the soldiers awarded with it were known as the ‘*Ganda pendara*’.¹

It can be said that these were a rudimentary form of medals which we have today. Other incentives include promotion and awarding of different titles to the soldiers with distinguished service.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND ESPIONAGE

“Great spies are known by their failures and not their victories “

- ***By RN Kao***
Director
Research & Analysis Wing
(1969-1967)

Espionage is an integral part of any state and acts as the 4th wheel of administration and the security of state, it is referred as the 4th wheel as it does no remains in the limelight of the people and even some of the top ranking officials. Even the history submits a number of evidences that the empire which have an efficient espionage system had the longest span.

Espionage in the Ancient Indian time sounds very exciting but it was very difficult and there was always a threat on the spies of being killed or being exposed as most of their work involved collection of human intelligence which included plans of invasions, details regarding the statistics of the army and that of the treasury.

¹ MILITARY HONOURS AND AWARDS IN ANCIENT INDIA

Author(s): U. P. Thapliyal

Source: Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. 56, No. 1/4 (1975), pp.236-240

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Apart from gathering all this information the spies were also used in counter intelligence ops i.e. catching enemy spies. Spies can also be used to keep a check on the rebellious tendencies among the various sects of the population and also to shape the public opinion regarding any issue.

The *Arthashastra* again provides a lot of information about the espionage and spy system that existed during the Mauryan Empire.

Kautilya classified the spies into two categories viz. *Samanstha* (stationary) and *Samancara* (moving). The *Samanstha* category included *kapatika* (students), *grahapatika* (housekeepers, maids, etc.), *vaidehaka* (traders) and *tapasa* (ascetics), which were deployed at a specific place and stayed there to collect information. The *Samancara* included *sattri* (secret agent), *rasada* (poison giver) and *bhikushki* (begging nun). The *Arthashastra* also refers to a system of communicating with the spies through secret channels.²

Another peculiar aspect which is rather a disputed one is about the *Vishakanyas* or the Poison Maidens. The *Visha Kanyas* are first mentioned in the ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, *Arthashastra* (*Arthashastra 11.1*), written by Chanakya. We also learn about the “Poison Damsel” (Sanskrit *Viṣakanyā*), a figure that appears in Sanskrit literature as a type of assassin used by kings to kill their enemies. According to these stories, young girls were raised on a carefully crafted diet of poison and antidote from an early age, a technique known as *mithridatism*.

Many of these girls would die during “training”, but those who managed to become immune to the various toxins would become human weapons as their bodily fluids became extremely poisonous to others.

As you can easily guess, any contact, especially sexual contact, was fatal to the men who had the bad luck to sleep with them. There are still no firm evidences to prove about them, but that’s the sole purpose of espionage which keeps the normal population away from this face of national security. This concept can also be seen in the cold war period where the intelligence agency of the USSR viz. the KGB (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti) introduced the concept of *HONEY TRAP* in the world of espionage which proved to be effective on their counterpart.

Another important thing to notice here is that the espionage network was a place where the *Varna* system didn’t exist, be it the *Kshatriyas*, *Brahmins*, *Vaishyas* or the *Shudras* everyone was recruited as a spy and performed their duties.

MEDICAL CORPS

Various branches of the army like the army medical corps, supply corps, etc. are not considered to be a fighting arm of the army and of any strategic importance cause most of the people believe that wars are only about killing the opponent, but it’s not true.

The medical corps have been an indispensable part of army since Vedic times. It’s pretty obvious and easy to understand why there is a need of a medic on the battlefield. In the Rig

²Uma Prasad Thapliyal, Warfare in Ancient India, p. 166

Veda we find that the leg were amputated and substituted with iron substitutes, injured eyes were plucked out and arrow shafts were extracted from the body of Aryan Warriors. ³ There are also some *mantras* present in the *Rig Veda* which talk about curing the warriors.

The Ancient Indian doctors devised various types of medicines which form the basis of modern day *Ayurveda*. For e.g. a technique called *shalyam* was used for the extraction of arrow heads from the body.⁴

The *Arthashastra* also talks about the army doctors taking medical kits with them to the expeditions and that forts should be properly supplied with the medicines. There are various treatments mentioned in this book like that of poisoning, stupefaction, etc. The medical corps were also responsible for the maintenance of the animals. The superintendents in the stable and that of the war elephants had a veterinary practitioner in their staff to assist them in matters of medicine and surgery.⁵ The army doctors also played an important role when the king himself went to any expedition.⁶

A.L. Basham says that ‘Indian surgery remained ahead of until the eight century, when the surgeons of the East India Company were not ashamed to learn the art of rhinoplasty (a surgery that changes the shape of nose) from the Indians.’⁷

The system of evacuation of the casualties was also pretty ahead of its time, the chariots acted as ancient ambulances and assisted the soldiers in the evacuation of the wounded and dead.⁸

MILITARY ENGINEERS (*Margadarshaka*)

Before the army sets to march it is important to correct the roads and make the bridges, etc. This is where the engineering core of the army comes into play. It includes the best architects, diggers, sappers (mine/IED defusing squad), civil engineers, tunnel and bridge makers, carpenters and what not.

Although infantry is an integral part of an army but the engineers are the first to come and the last to leave the battlefield, men who are a combination of great warriors but better engineers were selected for this purpose from the Vedic age to the present day. They always march ahead of everyone and can be said as the tip of the spear.

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* provide numerous examples where the role of the engineers have been mentioned. The reason why they are called *margadarshaka* is because they used to look after the conditions of the marching route of the army like condition of the roads, etc.

The *Ramayana* mentions about some people called as *marginah* who were responsible to look after the roads.⁹

³ Satya Prakash, Founders of Science in Ancient India, p.239

⁴⁴ *Sushrut, Sushrutsamitah*, 26

⁵ Warfare in Ancient India , Uma Prasad Thapliyal, p. 168

⁶ *Ibid.*p.169

⁷ A.L. Bashm, The Wonder That Was India, p. 500

⁸ *Agni Pu.*, 236.44.-8

⁹ UP Thapliyal, Warfare in Ancient India, p.170

There might be other functions of the military engineers like that of reinforcing the defences of any fort or forward post, designing of chariots, etc. But all of this lacks proper evidences and are mere speculations.

MILITARY SIGNALS (*Sanketa*)

The signal corps play a vital role in the proper coordination and movement of the army. Normal voice commands which are understood and can be easily interpreted by the enemy are of no use in the battlefield. The signal corps provide a solution to this problem.

As we know there were no radio sets or SAT COMMS in the Ancient India to command and communicate with the forces and to administer their formations, deployment and other such actions, it's quite exciting and astonishing that the ancient Indian armies devised very efficient signalling techniques and many instruments which were efficient at signalling.

One such instrument was the *dundhubi* which was basically a type of drum and its beats were used in the battlefield to command the deployed forces.¹⁰

The *Shukraniti* is an excellent source which talks about the methods of signalling that existed in the Ancient Indian times.¹¹ Later on in the 4th Century BC the Indians learned the art of signalling using a trumpet (*turya*) from the Greeks.¹² The *Arthashastra* says that the instructions of the commander were conveyed to the soldiers through the trumpets and also with the help of the *dhvaj* (standards) and the *patakas* (flags).¹³

STRATEGICAL & TACTICAL CONCEPTS

The Indian sub-continent has been a place where great military thinkers and strategists were born since ancient times. Some of them had exceptional and extraordinary instinct and ability to produce mind-blowing strategies in the art of war like *Brahaspati*, *Dronaacharya*, *Shukraacharya*, *King Porus*, etc.

History stands witness that one who has better brains stands victorious, always. The numbers though provide an edge and are a determining aspect of any war, but it's the strategy which decides who will stand victorious.

Strategy making part of any war mostly deals with the battle formations, deployment of the army, and use of allied forces and are focussed at using less force but properly, in order to defeat the enemy. For e.g. the famous battle formation mentioned in the *Mahabharata* is the *Chakra Vyuha*. It was a powerful defensive array which was considered incapable to overcome or be defeated. In this array the army was deployed and placed in such a manner that it gave the look of a circular hoop or *chakra*. It was a kind of circular arrangement of forces open at one point only.¹⁴

¹⁰ UP Thapliyal, Warfare In Ancient India, p. 170

¹¹ Ibid., p.171

¹² J.W. Mcrindle, The Invasion of India, p. 206

¹³ Ibid., p. 340 ; also p. 208

¹⁴ C.N. Vaidya, Epic India, p.260

The purpose and objective of these complex military formations was to trap the enemy and force him into the predefined killing ground. Another peculiar aspect of these battle arrays was the fact that as the enemy pushed further into them the exit routes were closed, thus suffocating him and eventually defeating him.

CHESS & WARFARE

Many archaeological evidences have been found at the Harappan site of Lothal situated in Gujarat. It was a port city of the Harappan Civilization. There were discovered many chessmen which resembled the modern chessman. Prof. S.R. Rao brought the earliest discovered archaeological evidence of chess in India to light in 1972 in his work *Lothal and Indus Valley Civilization*.¹⁵

If we look at the game of chess, one can easily point out that apart from being a simple board game used for entertainment and sports, it also provides a scope and acts as an ancient simulator of battlefield which can be used to devise a fool proof strategy to defeat the enemy.

Considering all this we can predict the importance that the game of chess played in the ancient times.

WEAPONS & ARMOUR

Indians used chopper tools and hand axes during the Stone Age.¹⁶ Various cave paintings of India dated around 7000BC, depict hunters carrying long spears and arrows tipped with sharp edged stones which indicates the weapons which were used at that time. It could have been possible that bones and horns might have been used for making arrow heads and javelin points.

It can also be said that the earliest weapon of humans was the spear and then evolved the arrow and bow and its alternatives like the blow pipe. Since the early humans were a bit cautious about their protection and wanted to stay far from the animals during hunting, they devised weapons which could hit their target from a long range.

Chalcolithic Age: The people of Indus Valley knew metallurgy and made weapons of bronze and copper.¹⁷ A unique feature of the excavated weapons indicates that they were made of alloy of metals like tin, arsenic, lead, etc. So it can be said on the basis of these facts that the IVC had a very rudimentary knowledge of metallurgy and defence production.

Spear was the principal weapon of the Harappans.¹⁸ Since there are no evidences regarding the use of shields or any type of body armour, it can be said that the Harappans were not very well equipped for any major war or conflict.

The main weapons included bows, arrows, spears, knives, axe and mace.¹⁹

¹⁵ C. Pandurga Bhatta, *India Origins of Chess : An Overview*, p. 2

¹⁶ U.P. Thapliyal, *Warfare in Ancient India*, p. 268

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 268

¹⁸ B.B. Lal, *The Earliest Civilization Of South Asia*, pp. 165-6

Vedic Age: The inhabitants of the Indus Valley Civilization were presumably conquered by the Aryans. This conflict brought about major changes in the history of warfare, as we all know it brought the concept of chariots and archers mounted on chariots and also a rudimentary form of cavalry.

In the *Rig Veda* there are several references to weapons like axes (*isvadhiti*), shining spears (*rishtih*) and arrows (*ishu*) made of copper or brass.²⁰ The development in mineralogy and metallurgy may have led to such advancements in defence production and quality of weapons.²¹ However, this assumption has been contradicted by many historians on the basis that in the widespread use of bronze in Iran around the second half of the second millennium BC the word *ayas* has been taken to mean bronze.

Aryans also knew the use of armour (*varman*), head-gear (*sirastranha*) and hand-guard (*hastaghna*).²² Since the Aryans have been attributed by many historians as the destroyers of towns, maybe it was this characteristic feature of the Aryan culture that brought a change in the strategy and mechanism of defence production, as we can see the divisions in manufacturing of chariots and other weapons, which is an advanced feature and much more superior than what existed during the Indus Valley Civilization.

After the discovery of Iron, which is still in discussion among the historians, the weapon production became stable and a majority classes of weapons came to be seen being used on the battlefield with minor changes, like bow and arrow, swords, mace, spears, etc.

Some unique weapons of the Ancient Indian Empires were:-

- **Thunderbolt (VAJRA):** The *vajra* was considered as a very powerful weapon by the Aryans. It can also be regarded as one of the mythological weapons as the *Rig Veda* tells us that this weapon was wielded by their supreme god viz. Lord *Indra*. Considering the weapon and other characteristics it can be said that Lord *Indra* resembled like the Greek god Zeus.

Another possibility is that in the tribal society of Aryans the *rajan* or the king was the military leader (Early Vedic Period) and he might have been compared to god or projected as god by the priestly class. So, it might be possible that *vajra* could have been a common weapon wielded by the king but was assigned with mythological powers by the priestly class in mere exaggeration of facts.

Nevertheless, the *Rig Veda* defines various types of *vajras* made of *ayas* (copper or iron), bones and even gold (*hiranya*). It can be said that *vajra* was a kind of rudimentary weapon which got replaced due to the introduction of hand wielded and more effective weapons like the *trishula* and other types of spears.

¹⁹ U.P. Thapliyal, Warfare in Ancient India, p.268

²⁰ S.D. Singh, Ancient Indian Warfare, pp. 86-95

²¹ A.C. Das, Rig Vedic Culture, pp. 331-7

²² G.C. Pandey, Dimensions Of Ancient Indian Social History, vol. 2, p. 100

- **CHAKRA:** This weapon again had a mythological impact. It is said that Lord Vishnu wielded this weapon. It was a circular disc like a bangle which had sharp edges for piercing the enemy's armour and skin. Later on in the Sikh Empire, it again achieved a sacred space and was seen in action.
- **FIREARMS (Agneyashastra):** Although we don't have enough evidence to prove the use or invention of firearms in ancient India, but, the *Arthashastra* provides a lot of evidences about the procedure of making of fire-powder by Kautilya and its usage in damaging the enemy's defences and supplies in the forts by the spies and on the battlefield by the soldiers.
- **SHIELD (Carman) & ARMOUR (Kavaca) :** The shield and the body armour which were worn by the soldiers are one of the most important part of a warriors kit and play a very crucial role in saving the life of a soldier, not only in ancient period but in modern day warfare also.

In 4th century BC an Indian soldier carried a buckler of undressed ox-hide in his hand, which was not as wide as the soldier who carried it, but was about as long.²³ Bucklers used by cavalry were somewhat shorter than that used by the infantry. Even the *Arthashastra* mentions about eight type of shields which were made of different materials like animal hide and of different shapes.

The wide use of the term *varman* mentioned in the *Rig Veda* suggests that the concept of body armour was well known to the Indians in the Vedic Age. We also find various hymns in the *Rig Veda* that talks about the body armour of the soldiers. Talking about the body armour, there are various instances where very beautifully made body armours have been shown. For e.g., in the 4th century BC king Porus fought Alexander while wearing a body armour with remarkable fitting and it was also shock proof. He got wounded in the left shoulder where the armour was missing.²⁴

CONCLUSION

After analysing all the important facts mentioned in various authentic sources like the *Arthashastra*, the *Rig Veda*, etc., one can say that though the in the Indian Subcontinent, the concept of War was never in that much discussion while resolving a problem, due to which the empires existing in this area were not able to modernise or improve the conditions of their military or their strategies, the invasions which took place in the Indian Subcontinent did shape the military strategy and developed a rudimentary form of military science, which can also be proved on the basis of the ancient literary works like the *Agni Purana* and the *Arthashastra* which actually approached this concept though not in much depth but still moderately. One more thing which can be pointed out is that this rudimentary form of military science which included military administration and other various heads which have been highlighted in this project, all of this also provided a base for the evolution of an efficient administrative structure and machinery.

²³ U.P. Thapliyal, Warfare In Ancient India, p. 291

²⁴ J.W. M'crindle, The Invasion of India, p. 108

Talking about the sources regarding development and other aspects of military, it can be said that one cannot consider the great epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as authentic sources as they were transformed down the generation verbally which allows for a lot of human errors and also unreasonable exaggeration of various things. Somewhere or the other one needs to adapt a multidimensional approach and thinking to figure out the reasonable facts as we cannot ignore the fact that after all, history is always written and is pretty subjective, which can be interpreted in multiple ways.

It can be said that the Indian Subcontinent has been a place where different invaders carried out various experiments and out of those experiments the best were carried on which made the upcoming structure of army and tactics. Even today various esteemed institutions and organizations around the world like the KGB, Mossad,