

A GLANCE AT MILITARY TECHNIQUES IN
RĀMĀYĀNA AND MAHĀBHĀRATA

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(Received 9 September 1987)

This article discusses in brief the achievement of the ancient Indians in military science on the basis of scriptures. It has been made clear that there was a heavy loss of some science and technology in the transit of *yugas*.

As has been noted by Monier Williams,¹ similar to the descending order of the span of the *yugas*, there is a physical as well as a moral deterioration of men in each age. Likewise some technology and science are lost in the transit of *yugas*. We find that there had been a heavy loss of the techniques of military science. Loss of some techniques is quite obvious. The king Pṛthvīrāja (11th century A.D.) of Delhi dynasty was a well known expert in sound seeking arrows (*Śabdavedhī Bāṇas*) but now-a-days we do not see any such person. These arrows were very well-known in ancient literature. *Vālmikiya Rāmāyāna* tells that Rāma surrounded the female demon Tāṭakā with sound-seeking arrows.²

This is a very minor example. Actually the ancient people were expert in many wonderful military techniques. No doubt, many of them were implemented with parapsychological techniques too. Parapsychological science has been discussed in another work of the author.^{2a} Unfortunately, these techniques are not seen in these days for implementation in military science (at public level). This article will mention very briefly some achievements of the ancients in military science mainly by describing some examples from scriptures.

Mighty celestial weapons are mentioned in *Vālmikiya Rāmāyāna*, *Bāla Kāṇḍa*.³ Although these seem to be based on parapsychological techniques, yet it is necessary to mention them here. The sage Viśwamitra gave these celestial weapons to Rāma. These are the divine *Brahma weapon*, the terror of the three worlds, *Daṇḍa weapon*, the destroyer of creatures ; *Dharmā weapon*, scarcely less fatal than *Kāla* himself ; *Kāla weapon*, the divine disc of Viṣṇu, terrible disc belonging to Indra and the irresistible *Vajra* (thunder bolt), *Śiva's spear* ;

Brahmaśira weapon (four-headed), *Aiṣīka* (ardent), two great maces named *Modakī* and *Śikhari*, *Dharmapāśa* (possibly a gin or net or rope for entangling the foe) ; dreadful *Kālapāśa*, highly valued *Varuṇapāśa*, the *Śuṣka* and *Ādra Aśani*, *Pināka* weapon, *Nārāyanāstra*, *Āgneyāstra*, *Śikharāstra* (having the property of flame) ; *Vāyavyāstra*, *Hayaśira Krauñca*, two *Śaktis* (powers) ; *Kaṅkāla mūsala*, *Kapāl* and *Kiṅkiṇī* (these four for destroying the demons) ; weapon of Vidyādhara which is known as *Nandana Sammohanāstra* ; *Prasvāpana* ; *Praśamana*, *Saumya* ; *Varṣaṇa* (a weapon which, when shot, divides into a large number and falls like a shower, or more probably, produces rain to create calamity to the enemy) ; *Śoṣana* (which dries up water and counteracts the *Varṣaṇa*) ; *Santāpana* ; *Vilāpana* ; *Mādana* which is the favoured weapon of Kandarpa, cherished *Gāndharva* weapon named as *Mānava* ; *Mohana* of *Pisācas* ; *Tāmas* ; *Saumana* ; irresistible *Samvarta*, *Mausala* ; *Satya* ; *Māyāmaya* ; *Tejaprabha* which destroys the power of the enemy ; weapon of Soma named as *Śiśira* ; supremely formidable *Tvaṣṭāra*, the terrible weapon of Bhaga and the *Śiṭeṣu* of Manu. It is said that these celestial weapons were able to assume any form at will⁴ (which is unthinkable by modern science and can only be explained by parapsychology). It is also said that after the sage Viśwāmitra conferred the incomparable *mantras* on Rāma which were used in applying the weapons and instructed him in the methods that were unknown even to the Gods, the weapons, furnished by Viśwāmitra and bestowed upon Rāma, appeared before him⁵ (i.e. the presiding deities of the weapons appeared before Rāma) and approaching with folded hands, said : “O Rāghava, we are thy servants and whatever thou desirest, will be performed by us.”

Rāma was delighted to hear the words of these powerful weapons, and grasping them with his hand, he said : “I call you to mind, come and serve me.”

It would be noted here that in *Dvāpara Yuga*, some divine weapons were conferred upon Arjuna too, but such appearance of the weapons is not seen.

Viśwāmitra conferred several more weapons like these.⁶ The most remarkable fact is that he told *the method of discharging as well as withdrawing them*.

It may be seen that the *Śiṭeṣu* weapon of Manu was hurled by Rāma within a week upon the demon Mārīca.⁷ As a result, Mārīca was flung into the sea, at a distance of one hundred *yojana* (more than 900 miles). Perceiving Mārīca to be reeling, struck senseless by the *Mānava* weapon, Rāma addressed Lakṣmaṇa saying “Behold the force of this great missile created by Manu, having the power of Manu Himself. Though Mārīca has been deprived of his senses, yet he is not dead.”

Out of the above weapons, the *Gāndharvāstra* seem to be quite miraculous. Its application is seen when Rāma was fighting alone with fourteen thousand of the demons.⁸ The wonderful effect of this weapon was that the soldiers of the enemy felt each other as Rāma and under this delusion slew each other in anger. Thus by applying this weapon, Rāma killed all of the fourteen thousand demons.

Not only this, it was again applied when he was fighting at Laṅkā. The same delusion was created there⁹ and he killed single handed in eighth part of the day (*i.e.* in approximately one and half an hour) ten thousand soldiers on chariots, eighteen thousand on great elephants, fourteen thousand cavalry and twenty thousand of infantry.¹⁰ On another occasion Rāma broke the fearful *Rudra weapon* forged by Maya and aimed at him, by the marvellous *Gāndharvāstra*.¹¹ We find that the technique of applying Gāndharva missile was mastered by two only,¹² Rāma and Rāvaṇa. However, the technique of breaking it was only with Rāma who broke it at once.¹³ *Gāndharvāstra* was also used by Abhimanyu in the Mahābhārata war.^{13a}

Arjuna used *Sammohanāstra*¹⁴ against the *Kauravas* by blowing his conch shell on the battle field. Perhaps, it was a kind of sound-producing missile which hypnotise the opposite army. As a result, the *Kauravas* put down their weapons, sat down quietly, and immediately became unconscious. Their clothes were taken away by prince Uttara. Use of such weapon was never seen after Arjuna.

The most powerful weapon *Brahmāstra*, which was admired by everybody, was also a kind of divine technique. It is learnt from *Vālmikīya Rāmāyāṇa* that Rāma plucked a blade of *Kusā* grass and transformed it into *Brahmāstra*.¹⁵ Then it burst at once into flame like fire of death for the crow wherever he flew. It is also learnt from *Vālmikīya Rāmāyāṇa* that when it is applied, it never remains ineffective.¹⁶ It was also used by Meghanāda¹⁷ who, on finding Hanumāna as impossible of being slain, bound him with the aid of this *Brahmāstra*. Due to the boon of Brahmā, Hanumāna was free after few minutes.¹⁸ On another occasion it was used by Meghanāda when he overthrew sixty seven crores of brave monkeys in four fifth part of a day.¹⁹ On this occasion, as was a universal convention, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa also honoured the *Brahmāstra* and they allowed themselves to be struck down by Indraajita with his rains of missiles.²⁰ In the night, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the whole army of monkeys were cured by medicinal herbs brought by Hanumāna.

It should not be forgotten here that we find a weapon associated with Lord Viṣṇu, named *Sudarśana Cakra* which was considered as a missile *par excellence*. It should also be mentioned here that the *Nārāyaṇāstra*, which is mentioned in *Vālmikīya Rāmāyāṇa* as well as in *Mahābhārata* was only second to the *Sudarśana Cakra*.

As has been mentioned elsewhere,^{2a} *Brahmāstra* was used upto the end of *Dwāpara Yuga* and was perhaps, lost after that *Yuga*.

Another weapon named as *Samvarta* was used by Bharata.²¹ The technique was probably given to him by Rāma who got it from Viśvamitra as mentioned earlier. The weapon was propelled by *mantras* and aimed at Gandharvas. Three crores of Gandharvas were slain in an instant. *Samvarta* is, of course, a weapon with which *Kāla* or time destroys the worlds. Use of this missile was never seen again.

We have, thus, seen that there were marvellous techniques and mighty weapons and missiles in ancient India. In most of these, some mysterious or parapsychological technique was involved. Some of these were lost in the transit of Tretā-Dvāpara and some in the transit of Dvāpara-Kali. We should not miss to mention here the marvellous fact that the great physicist Openheimer once said in a public lecture at Princeton (attended by Wrangler G.L. Chandratre of Veda Vidnyan Mandal, Pune) in 1957 that the German scientists got the idea of atom and nuclear energy contained in it from the study of *Vedānta*.

There were some techniques for security of a city or region. Hanumāna tells²² Rāma about Laṅkā that 'the city has big gateways which are extremely high and furnished with strong doors which are closed with massive iron bars. Catapults, darts and stones are placed near at hand capable of repelling the assaults of the enemy, and the valiant titans have heaped in readiness, formidable spears in their hundreds. The city is encircled with a high golden wall difficult to scale, lined within with precious gems, corals, emeralds and pearls. On all sides awe inspiring moats of great splendour, filled with icy water, have been dug which are deep and abounding in crocodiles and fishes. At the entrance to these dykes there are four long *drawbridges* furnished with innumerable weapons and five great cannons are placed round about, which defend the entries against the approach of the enemy whose battalions would be flung by these engines of war into the moats on every side. The most important of these bastions, impossible to force, is of unsurpassable strength and dazzling with its pillars and fulcrums of gold.'

Mahābhārata also describes²³ defence arrangements of Dvārakā in the context of war between Śalva and Kṛṣṇa. We find *śṛṅgikā*, the cannons, and *avapothikā*, the antimissiles alongwith towers and turrets. There has been a mention of *utkṣipta gulma* but in the context of present days it is not intelligible. However, *utkṣipta* indicates that there was some device to throw up some thing in the sky.

Moreover, we find some procedures of war by making *vyūhas*—*vyūharacanā*, *morcābandī* (draw up in battle-array). On the seventh day of the Bhārata war Duryodhana performed the *Mahāvikaṭa vyūha* and in its reply Yudhiṣṭhira arranged the *Sṛṅgāṭaka*²⁴ *vyūha*. On the thirteenth day Kauravas performed the *cakra* 1 *vyūha*.²⁵ On fourteenth day, we find *Śakaṭa vyūha* and *Sūcī vyūha* in the Kaurava's army. *Sarvatobhadra vyūha* was arranged in the Kaurava army on 9th day by Bhīṣma and on the 18th day by Salva. Several more *vyūhas* are found mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. *Sūcimukha* (77.59.5) *acala* or *vajra* (devised by Indra) (ibid 7), *krauñcārūṇa* (first described by Bṛhaspati to Indra, 50.40), *mahāvvyūha* (51.10), *ardha candra* (VI.56.II), *garuḍa* (56.2), *makara* (VI.68.4), *śyena* (68.7), *krauñca* (76.15), *maṇḍala* (81.12), *sarvatobhadra* (VI.99.7), *āsura*, *paiśāca*, *rākṣasa* (VI.108.16), etc. may be mentioned. It classifies the *vyūhas* in *mānuṣa*, *daiva*, *gāndharva*, and *āsura* (vi.19.2).

But perhaps these arrangements have no significance in these days and as such, are not heard at present.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS :

The author thanks the authorities of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla for a Fellowship and necessary facilities.

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- ^{2a} Paramhans, S.A., *An Outline of Indian Contribution to Science*, Chapt.8.4, to be published by Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla.
- ³ *Rāmāyāṇa*, Chapter 27.
- ⁴ *ibid*, 27.21.
- ⁵ *ibid*, 27.23-27.
- ⁶ *ibid*, 28.4-10.
- ⁷ *ibid*, 30.18-20.
- ⁸ *ibid*, Aranyakāṇḍa, 25.37.
- ⁹ *ibid*, Yuddhakāṇḍa, 93.25.
- ¹⁰ *ibid*, 93.31-33.
- ¹¹ *ibid*, 100.5.
- ¹² *ibid*, 102.19.
- ¹³ *ibid*.
- ^{13a} *Mahābhārata*, ed. Motilal Jalan, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, V.S. 2029 ; *Droṇaparva*, 45.21-22.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, *Vīrāṭaparva*, 61.11-12.
- ¹⁵ *Rāmāyāṇa*, *Sundarakāṇḍa*, 38.29-31.
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, 38.34 ; also *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, 92.32.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, *Sundarakāṇḍa*, 48.37.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, 36.21 ; also *Sundarakāṇḍa*, 48.48.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Chapters 73 and 74.
- ²⁰ *ibid.*, 73.70.
- ²¹ *ibid.*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, 101.8.
- ²² *ibid.*, *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, 3.11-18.
- ²³ *Mahābhārata*, *Aranyakaparva*, Chapters 16-23.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, *Bhīṣmaparva*.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, *Droṇaparva*.