



## War in the *Śukranīti* and the *Arthaśāstra* – A Comparative Study

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### Abstract

War is a political institution and a necessary evil. War is as old as the human race. The *Śukranīti* and the *Arthaśāstra* are ancient treatises on polity. Śukra's discussion on military administration and art of war is comprehensive and supplies ample evidence of the keen insight of the author in the military strategies. In the *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya also discusses on war, weapons, battle arrays, etc. in a systematic way. The different types of war, weapons, battle arrays of the *Śukranīti* and the *Arthaśāstra* are discussed in a comparative way.

### I. Introduction

War means victory or defeat. It is generally characterized by extreme aggression, destruction and mortality using regular or irregular military forces. It could also be a state of armed conflict between societies. The conception of war as an engine for destroying the heathen or barbarian, which prevailed in ancient Greece and Rome is seen to operate in Indian also.<sup>1</sup> The *Mahābhārata* says that Indra invented war for destroying the *dasyus* and weapons and armour are created for the same end.<sup>2</sup> Warfare has been defined as the affair that two parties who have inimical relations undertake by means of arms to satisfy their rival interests.<sup>3</sup> It is that by which the enemy is opposed and subjugated.<sup>4</sup> Kauṭilya also says that the destruction of the enemy is called war.<sup>5</sup>

### II.i. Classification of Warfare in the *Śukranīti*

War is generally classified under two heads, viz. *dharmayuddha* and *kūṭayuddha*.<sup>6</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa* also mentions two types of warfare.<sup>7</sup> However the author of the *Śukranīti* states again three classifications, based on the use of weapons, viz. *daivika*, *āsura* and *mānuṣa*. The *daivika* war is that variety in which charms and spells are used. This is chiefly spoken of in connection with the fights between *devas* and *asuras*. The *āsura* form is one in which mechanical instruments are employed. Wherever engines and contrivances causing sweeping destruction are used there is probably the *āsura* method of fighting. The *mānuṣa* war is that where organized forces are engaged in military array.<sup>8</sup>

### II.ii. Classification of Warfare in the *Arthaśāstra*

Kauṭilya classifies the nature of fight into three categories,<sup>9</sup> viz., *prakāśayuddha*, *kūṭayuddha* and *tūṣṇīyuddha*. The *tūṣṇīyuddha* are also known by the term *mantrayuddha*, *vyāyāmayuddha* and *śākatayuddha*.<sup>10</sup> In the *prakāśayuddha* guilds and stratagems have no place. Here the virtuous king calls his soldiers and explains to them the purpose of the fight. Here Kauṭilya has unconsciously favoured open fight by associating virtue with a fair fight. In this, place and time for fighting are indicated and it is most righteous.<sup>11</sup>

The *kūṭayuddha* is a method of warfare, fought at any time and under all circumstances, where the enemy country is devastated, burnt down and the civilians are taken into captivity. Night attack, attacking enemy when it is suffering from hunger and thirst and when it is tired, suffers from death and disease are some modes of *kūṭayuddha*.<sup>12</sup> It is also called treacherous fight. Kauṭilya admits that this warfare is unjust and unethical. But the king to gain his end would adopt any means whatsoever. Kauṭilya permitted this war but there are definite rules about quarters to be given to the enemy, for instance, one who has laid down arms and has thrown himself on the mercy of the conqueror is not to be slain and a wounded or fleeing person is not to be attacked.<sup>13</sup>

The *tūṣṇīyuddha* is the battle of intrigues which involves a long series of diplomatic assassinations through spies with the help of poisons, fires, and various guiles and stratagems.<sup>14</sup>

The *Arthaśāstra* attach some importance to a variety of warfare which is not fair and open. The *Dharmaśāstras* are never for the use of wily or underhand methods in fighting.<sup>15</sup> The *Arthaśāstras* subordinate considerations of morality to those of expediency and practical gain. But even they do not permit *kūṭayuddha* in all cases,<sup>16</sup> and it is certainly not fair and commendable. It is mentioned merely as a resource for the weak against the powerful. Śukra says that there is no warfare which extirpates the powerful enemy like the *kūṭayuddha*. A king need follow *nīti* or moral rules only so long as he is in a position to overcome others. The *Agni Purāṇa*<sup>17</sup>



permits secret and underhand harassing only by the weaker states.

### II.iii. Weapons

Weapons play an essential role in warfare. In the early Vedic period bow and arrow are used for offensive purposes.<sup>18</sup> The shape of the bow is curved and the bow string called *javā*<sup>19</sup> is made of cow hide. The arrow has been described as *karṇayoni*,<sup>20</sup> because the arrow set in the bow is discharged from the ear. Among other offensive weapons mention has been made of sword, i.e., *asi*,<sup>21</sup> spear, i.e., *srakti*,<sup>22</sup> lance, i.e., *sṛka*,<sup>23</sup> missile, i.e., *didyu*<sup>24</sup> and stones, i.e., *adri* or *aśani*.<sup>25</sup> In the *Rgvedic* period various defensive armors are also used. The most important of these is *varma* comprising metal pieces sewn, i.e., *śyuta* together.<sup>26</sup> From the description of the *varma* it seems that a coat of mail is meant. It is worth nothing that the real shield is possibly unknown.

### II.iv. Weapons in the Śukranīti

Weapons are very essential for fighting in the battle field, defending country and forts as well as for destroying an enemy's fortifications. Śukra mentions two types of arms called *astra* and *śāstra*. *Astra* is defined as a weapon thrown or cast down by means of *mantra*, i.e., charms or magic, machine or fire while weapons other than *astras*, viz., sword, dagger etc. are called *śāstra*.<sup>27</sup>

The author of the *Śukranīti* gives a detailed description of fire arms and gun powder. He refers to tubular or cylindrical *astra* of which two varieties, viz., big and small are mentioned. The balls used therein are made of iron or some other substance and they are flung by the touch of fire. Undoubtedly, this *astra* is nothing but a canon brought into action with the help of gun-powder.<sup>28</sup>

In the *Rgveda*,<sup>29</sup> it is mentioned that Agni is praised for vanquishing an enemy. There is a reference in the *Atharvaveda*<sup>30</sup> to the leaden balls discharged from the cylinders. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*<sup>31</sup> describes the arrow with fire at its head. The *Manusmṛiti*<sup>32</sup> also refers to fire arms.

Hence it may be well surmised that the use of fire arms, gun powder and its application to the discharge of missiles from projectile weapon was very much known in ancient India.

### II.v. Weapons in the Arthaśāstra

Kauṭilya, in the *Arthaśāstra* referred to war machineries both for defensive and offensive purposes. He is of the opinion that the superintendent of the armory should be responsible for making those armories.<sup>33</sup> Kauṭilya classifies the equipment of war

into three groups, viz., *yantras*, i.e., machines, *āyudhas*, i.e., weapons, *āvaraṇa*, i.e., armours.<sup>34</sup>

Against this classification of Kauṭilya, the *Agnipurāṇa* classifies them into five categories, viz., *yantramukta*, i.e., thrown by machines, *pāṇimukta*, i.e., thrown by hand, *muktasamdhārata*, i.e., thrown and drawn back, *amukta*, i.e., not thrown and *bāhuyuddham*, i.e., when both warriors struggle by hand without arms.<sup>35</sup>

The *yantra* is further divided by Kauṭilya into two broad groups viz., immovable i.e., *sthītantranī* and movable i.e., *calayantranī*.<sup>36</sup> The *Arthaśāstra* refers to twenty-six types of machines out of which ten are immovable and sixteen are movable. The immovable machines are as follows (i) *sarvatobhadra* i.e., a small cart capable of hurling stones on all sides, (ii) *jāmadagnya*, i.e., a large machine to shoot arrows, (iii) *bahumukha*, i.e., one with archers, (iv) *viśvāsaghāti*, i.e., a cross beam at the gateway so placed as to make it fall when the enemy enters, (v) *saṃghāṭī*, i.e., a long pole to set fire to the fort, (vi) *yānaka*, i.e., a rod mounted on a wheel to be hurled against enemies, (vii) *parjanya*, i.e., a water machine to put out fire, (viii) *bāhū*, i.e., two pillars placed opposite each other to be pulled down when enemies enter (ix) *ardhabāhū*, i.e., pillar measuring half of the above, and (x) *ūrdhabāhū*, i.e., a single pillar, fifty *hastas* long, slaying by release of mechanism.<sup>37</sup>

The following sixteen machines, mentioned by Kauṭilya, are movable machines (i) *pāñcālīka*, i.e., a wooden beam with sharp points outside the fort wall, (ii) *devadaṇḍa*, i.e., a pole with nails, (iii) *sūkarikā*, i.e., a leather wall to protect the roads, towns etc. against stones thrown by enemies, (iv) *mūṣalayaṣṭī*, i.e., a pointed rod of *khādira*, (v) *hastivāraka*, a rod with two or three points to prevent elephants from resting on, (vi) *tālavṛnta*, i.e., a form like that of disc, (vii) *mudgara*, i.e., hammer, (viii) *gadā*, i.e., mace, (ix) *spr̥ktalā*, a rod with sharp points on its surface, (x) *kuddāla* i.e., spade, (xi) *āsphāṭina*, a leather bag with a rod, (xii) *udghāṭima*, i.e., a machine to pull down towers etc., (xiii) *utpāṭima*, (xiv) *śatāghni*, (xv) *triśūla*, i.e., a trident, and (xvi) *cakra*, i.e., disc.<sup>38</sup>

Kauṭilya mentions the names of weapons like *śakti*, *prāsa*, *kunta*, *hātaka*, *bhiṇḍipāla*, *śūla*, *tomara*, *varāhakarṇa*, *kaṇaya*, *karpaṇa*, *trāsikā* and others with piercing points.<sup>39</sup> He stated about bow and bow-strings and arrows. According to him, made from *tāla*, *cāpa*, wood and horn and known as *kārmuka*, *koḍaṇḍa* and *drūṇa* are the bows. *Mūrvā*, *arka*, *śaṇa*, *gavedhu*, *veṇu* and sinews of animals are bow-strings. *Beṇu*, *śara*, *śalākā*, *daṇḍāsana* and *nārācā* are arrows.<sup>40</sup> *Paraśu*, *kuthāra*, *paṭṭasa*, *khanitra*, spade, saw, and *kāṇḍacchedana*, according to Kauṭilya, are



razor-type weapons. There are weapons of stones also, and these stones are used for throwing to the enemies from the machines.<sup>41</sup>

From the above discussion, we may draw inference that there are some resemblances in respect of arms and weapons of modern age to those of the earlier periods. We may cite the instance of bow and arrows resembling to gun and bullets of modern times. Thus, it can be said that some other weapons mentioned in the *Śukranīti* and the *Arthasāstra* bear some resemblance to the modern weapons.

### II.vi. Concept of Battle Array

Making of military arrays or battle orders is regarded as the most significant aspect of the traditional military science in India. It is believed that success in war largely depend on arrangement of arrays in the battle field. The term for battle array or order in Sanskrit is *vyūha*. The concept of *vyūha* is one of the most significant features of ancient Indian military science. It literally means placing apart, distribution or arrangement. These *vyūha* are to be formed with the purpose to co-ordinate action of all arms, units and sub-units in the battle field, flung over a wide area and to actuate them for a common cause. In the *Mahābhārata*, the story of Abhimanyu fighting alone with the *saptarathīs* within a *cakra-vyūha* is very much well known.

### II.vii. Battle Array in the *Śukranīti*

The army must be trained in battle arrays as well as in other military tactics.<sup>42</sup> The author of the *Śukranīti* have been defined some of the *vyūhas* with their significance in certain situations. Śukra depicts ten types of battle arrays, viz., *krauñca*, *śyena*, *makara*, *sūcī*, *cakra*, *sarbatobhadra*, *golaka*, *śakata*, *vyāla*, *vajra*.<sup>43</sup>

The *krauñca* array is like the movements of pigeons in the sky. It is formed according to the nature of the region and the troops in the same rows. The structure of *śyena* array is like a bird. The wings of a bird are large, the throat and the tail are medium and the mouth is small. The left and right side of the *śyena* array consists of large numbers of troops, in the front the troops should be small in quantity and in the middle and back side medium numbers of troops should be arranged. The *makara* array is known as crocodile array also. It has four legs, long and thick mouth and two lips. The *sūcī* array is like a needle. It has a thin mouth, the middle part of this array is long and in the last part there is a whole. The *cakra* array has eight concentric rings and one path to enter. The *sarbatobhadra* array is that where troops are divided into eight parts in all sides. In the *golaka* array there is no path to enter and all the troops are facing in all

the directions. It has eight concentric rings. The *śakata* array has the aspect of a vehicle. The array which is formed like a snake is known as *vyāla* array. In addition to these the author of the *Śukranīti* also mentions the *vajra* array.

Śukra also mentioned that the arrays should be constructed in the battlefield according to the nature of obstacle to be countered. Śukra says that, when the obstacle comes from ahead then *makara*, *śyena* and *sūcī* array should be constructed in the battlefield. If the danger comes from behind then *śakata* arrays should be arranged. The *vajra* array is constructed if the danger arises on the sides. The *sarbatobhadra*, *cakra* and *vyāla* arrays are constructed when danger in all sides.<sup>44</sup>

The discussion on the *vyūhas* makes it clear that the author of the *Śukranīti* is not only a socio-political thinker but an expert in military sciences as well.

### II.viii. Battle Array in the *Arthasāstra*

The earliest extent theoretical discussion on *vyūha* occurs in the *Arthasāstra*. Kauṭilya gives an exhaustive description of how to arrange the forces for a set-piece battle, starting with positioning of reinforcements made up of the best forces at about a kilometer behind the battle ground. According to him battle formations of different kinds should be arranged according to rules, so that the strength of the four constituents of the forces could be used appropriately.<sup>45</sup> Uśanas, an authority earlier to Kauṭilya have described a form battle array consisting of two wings, one at centre and the other reserves; but according to Bṛhaspati, it has two wings, two flanks, a centre and reserves. Kauṭilya seems to have agreed with both dispositions<sup>46</sup> classify the arrays into four basic groups, viz., *daṇḍavyūha*, *bhogavyūha*, *maṇḍalavyūha* and *asamhatavyūha*.<sup>47</sup>

With regard to *daṇḍavyūha* there are two mutually incompatible definitions in Kauṭilya. According to the first definition, the array in which the soldiers are arranged in *tiryagvṛtti*, i.e., an angular position is called *daṇḍavyūha*.<sup>48</sup> The second definition is that in the *daṇḍavyūha* wings, flanks and the centre are evenly operative.<sup>49</sup> According to Nyāyacandrikā and Śrīmūla the second definition has been proposed by Bṛhaspati, but as pointed out by Kangle, this is unwarranted.<sup>50</sup> The first definition is, however accepted to all. There are seventeen varieties of *daṇḍavyūha*, viz., *pradara*, *dr̥ḍaka*, *asahya*, *śyena*, *cāpa*, *cāpakūṣi*, *pratiṣṭha*, *supratiṣṭha*, *sañjaya*, *vijaya*, *sthūṇākarna*, *viśālavijaya*, *cammūka*, *jhaśāsya*, *sūcī*, *balaya* and *durjaya*.<sup>51</sup>

Kauṭilya states that according to Uśanas and Bṛhaspati, the array in which the different units are



arranged one behind the other is called *bhogavyūha*.<sup>52</sup> But in disagreeing the above definition Kauṭilya holds that in the *bhogavyūha* the front, flanks and wings of the array are of unequal depth.<sup>53</sup> There are five varieties of *bhogavyūha*, viz., *sarpasāri*, *gomutrikā*, *śakata*, *makara* and *pāripātantaka*.<sup>54</sup>

According to Kauṭilya in the *maṇḍalavyūha* the wings, flanks and centre becomes one, which Kangle explains as a situation when distance between them is not there. The two varieties of *maṇḍalavyūha* are *sarvatobhadra* and *durjaya*.<sup>55</sup>

In the *asamhatavyūha* the wings, flanks and the centre are of a disjointed nature. The *asamhatavyūha* are classified as, *vajra*, *uddhānaka*, *ardhacandraka*, *ariṣṭa*, *acala* and *apratihata*.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the armies formed in different arrays could attack the enemy in a variety of ways. Kauṭilya mentions the arrays, if an attack is anticipated, in the following way. In the front the *makaravyūha* should be formed. In the rear the *śakataavyūha*, on the two flanks the *vajrayūha* should be formed. On all sides the *sarvatobhadravayūha* and if the path is narrow permitting only single file, then *sūcivyūha* should be formed.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Kauṭilya gives stress on the point of one's intelligence. One may not kill even one person if he is devoid of intellect. So, Kauṭilya says that an arrow, discharged by an archer, may kill one person or may not kill even one; but intellect operated by a wise man would kill even children in the womb.<sup>58</sup>

### III. Comparison of War in the *Śukranīti* and the *Arthaśāstra*

Śukra classifies the war under two heads, viz. *dharmayuddha* and *kūṭayuddha*. However, the author of the *Śukranīti* states again three classifications, based on the use of weapons, viz. *daivika*, *āsura* and *mānuṣa*. On the other hand, Kauṭilya classifies the nature of fight into three categories, viz., *prakāśayuddha*, *kūṭayuddha* and *tūṣṇīyuddha*. Both Śukra and Kauṭilya mention *kūṭayuddha*. Though Kauṭilya refers *kūṭayuddha*, but he does not permit this war in all cases. Weapons are very essential for fighting. Various kinds of weapons are used by Śukra and Kauṭilya. Śukra divides the weapons under *astra* and *śastra* category and Kauṭilya classifies the equipment of war into *yantra*, *āyudha* and *āvarena* category. In the *Arthaśāstra*, a separate chapter has been given on *āyudhagar* while describing weapons, but there is no separate chapter for weapons in the *Śukranīti*. The description of the use of fiery means gunpowder in the war is found in the *Śukranīti* and the *Arthaśāstra*.

Śukra depicts ten types of battle arrays, viz., *krauñca*, *śyena*, *makara*, *sūci*, *cakra*, *sarbatobhadra*,

*golaka*, *śakata*, *vyāla*, *vajra*. Kauṭilya classify the arrays into four basic groups, viz., *daṇḍavyūha*, *bhogavyūha*, *maṇḍalavyūha* and *asamhatavyūha*. Again, Kauṭilya divides these four under sub-categories. There are seventeen varieties of *daṇḍavyūha*, five varieties of *bhogavyūha*, two varieties of *maṇḍalavyūha* and six varieties of *asamhatavyūha*. Both the books refer the importance of battle array in warfare. Śukra and Kauṭilya mentioned that the array should be constructed in the battlefield according to the nature of obstacles.

1. S.V.Viswanatha, *International Law in Ancient India*, p.108-109
2. *Mahābhārata*, *Udyoga Parva*, 29-31
3. *Śukranīti*, IV.VII.220
4. *vikaṣṭaḥsanvādhīnobhavecchatrustuyenavai/ Śukranīti*, IV.VII.236
5. *apakārovigrahaḥ, Arthaśāstra*, VII.1.7
6. *Śukranīti*, IV.VII.359
7. *kuryātparakāśayuddham hi kūṭayuddhamviparyaye/ Agni Purāṇa*, 242.13
8. *mantrāstrairdaivikamyuddhamnālādyastrastathāsura m/ śastrabāhusamutthantumānavamyuddhamīritam// Śukranīti*, IV.VII.221
9. *Arthaśāstra*, VII.6.40-41
10. V.R.RamachandraDikhitkar, *Hindu Administrative Institutions*, p.305
11. *Arthaśāstra*, X.3.26-27
12. *Ibid.*, X.3
13. *Ibid.*, XIII.4.52
14. *Ibid.*, XII.2
15. S.V.Viswanatha, *International Law in Ancient India*, p.121
16. ...*viparjayekūṭayuddham/ Arthaśāstra*, X.3.2
17. *Agni Purāṇa*, 240.16
18. *Ṛgveda*, VIII.72.4
19. *Ibid.*, VI.75.17
20. *Ibid.*, II.24.8
21. *Ibid.*, I.162.20
22. *Ibid.*, VII.18.17
23. *Ibid.*, I.32.12
24. *Ibid.*, I.71.5
25. *Ibid.*, VI.6.5
26. *Ibid.*, I.31.15; X.101.8
27. *asyatekṣipyateyattumantrayantrāgnibhiṣca tat/ astraṁtadanyatśāstramasikuntādikamcayat// Śukranīti.*, IV.VII.191
28. *Śukranīti.*, IV.VII.194-196
29. *Ṛgveda*, I.19.5; I.27.3,6; VI.4.5
30. *Atharvaveda*, I.16.4
31. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, I.4.8





32. *Manusm̐hitā*, VII.90
33. *Arthaśāstra*, II.18.1-4
- 34.... yantramāyudhamāvaraṇamupakaraṇaṁ.../  
*Ibid.*, II.18.1
35. *Agnipurāṇa*, 248.2
36. *Arthaśāstra*, II.18.5-6
37.  
sarvatobhadraḥjāmadagnyahumukhaviśvāsaghātisa  
mḡhāṭīyānakaparjanyakabhūrdhvabhūrdhabāhūni  
sthitayantrāṇi // *Ibid.*, II.18.5
38. *Ibid.*, II.18.6
39. *Ibid.*, II.18.7
40. *Ibid.*, II.18.8-10
41. *Ibid.*, II.18.14-15
42. *Śukranīti*, IV.VII.11; 267
43. *Ibid.*, IV.VII.265-266, 279-283
44. *Ibid.*, IV.VII.264-265
45. etenavidhināvūhānoḥjānyugmāmścakārayet/  
vibhavoyāvadaṅgānāmcatuṛṇāmsadr̥ṣobhavet//  
*Arthaśāstra*, X.5.57
46. *Ibid.*, X.6.1-2
47. *Ibid.*, X.6.3
48. *Ibid.*, X.6.4
49. *Ibid.*, X.6.8
50. R. P. Kangle, *Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra*, p.456
51. *Ibid.*, X.6.9-23
52. *Ibid.*, X.6.5
53. *Ibid.*, X.6.24
54. *Ibid.*, X.6.25-29
55. *Ibid.*, X.6.30-32
56. *Ibid.*, X.6.34-41
57. *Ibid.*, X.2.9
58. ekamhanyāna.../*Ibid.*, X.6.51

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