

KAUTILYA ON WAR

The *Kautiliya Arthaśāstra* deals with war as one of the instruments of foreign policy. The ideal set before the ruler in this text is that of conquest and of establishment of suzerainty over the *cakravarti-Kṣetra*, that is the whole of the Indian sub-continent. For achieving this objective, the adoption of a policy of war may often be necessary. Kautilya therefore, describes at length how an offensive war should be successfully conducted. At the same time he also explains in detail how the victim of aggression should endeavour to save himself.

Normally the policy of war is the culmination of a policy of hostility (*vigraha*) towards another state. It is, however, regarded as conceivable that in certain circumstances war may be undertaken even against a state with which one is at peace (*saṁdhi*) at the time. The adoption of a policy of aggressive war results in *yāna*, a military expedition against an enemy (7. 4. 14. 18)¹.

The *Arthaśāstra* recommends that a number of factors must be taken into careful consideration before deciding to undertake a military campaign against some enemy. These are principally (1) the relative strength of the two parties between whom the fighting is to take place, (2) the nature of the terrain where it is likely to take place and (3) the season when it is planned to take place. The strength of a state lies in three things—(i) resources in the form of the armed forces and finances needed to keep them going (*prabhavasakti*); (ii) the personal energy and drive of the rulers of the state (*utsāhaśakti*); and (iii) capacity to arrive at right decisions after careful deliberation together with skill in the use of diplomacy (*mantrasakti*). A state contemplating a military campaign against another state, must satisfy itself about its own superiority in these respects, especially in the matter of *mantraśakti* (9.1.14–15).

Besides, the state must calculate beforehand the gains likely to be obtained and the losses likely to be suffered in the course of the campaign as well as the expenses that would be necessary for its successful conclusion. It is only when the gains expected far outweigh the likely losses and expenses that a military campaign is recommended (9.4,3).

1. The references in brackets are to the new edition of the *Kautiliya Arthasastra* published by the Bombay University.

Moreover, it is essential to take certain precautions before the start of the campaign. It is necessary to see that no troubles arise in the rear while the bulk of the armed forces, with the ruler at their head, are campaigning away from home. The troubles may be caused by some state dignitaries rising in revolt against the ruler when the latter is absent from the state. They might also join hands with some other enemy of the state to seize the kingdom. The text describes at great length—in four chapters, (9.3, 9.5-7)—how the possibility of such revolts and troubles in the rear should be foreseen and steps taken to prevent them from arising, before one leaves the home state on a military expedition. It is recommended that generally one-third or one-fourth of the armed forces raised for the campaign should be left behind in the kingdom for this purpose (9.1.34). A regent, *śūnyapāla* should be appointed in over-all charge of the state, who is to see to it that no troubles arise during the ruler's absence (9.3.10).

Preparations for the campaign are to start with the mobilisation of the necessary troops and their proper equipment. As is well-known, the army in ancient India consisted of four kinds of fighting forces : elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry. Again from another point of view, the state may have at its disposal six kinds of such forces: hereditary troops, hired troops, banded troops, the troops of an ally, the troops of an enemy (conquered from him) and forest troops. The general principle regarding the raising of troops for a campaign is that they must be such as would be able to overcome easily the forces which the enemy in question may have at his disposal at the time (9-2-25).

As to the equipment of the troops, the *Arthashastra* enumerates a large number of weapons and armours. It mentions spears and lances of various types and sizes, bows and arrows, swords, etc. as well as a large number of machines, *yantras*. These latter seem to have been mainly useful for assault on a fortified place or for defending such a place. Shields, coats of mail and armours of various types are also mentioned (Ch. 2.18). Besides, accoutrements and ornaments for elephants, horses and chariots are also referred to (2.32.12-15; 2.30.42; 2.33.6).

The text naturally lays emphasis on the training of the armed forces. Different *adhyakṣas* or superintendents are to be in charge of the four types of troops, responsible for their care, training and equipment. The duties of the *adhyakṣas* in charge of horses and elephants are particularly described at great length (Chs. 2.30-33). It is laid down that every day at sunrise except on holidays all the four types of fighting forces should carry out exercises in their respective modes of fighting, and that the ruler himself should inspect the various units and observe their fighting qualities at frequent intervals (5.3.35-36). In fact, in the king's daily routine a part of every day is reserved for the inspection of troops (1.19.15). It is clear that such training and inspection is meant to be carried out even during peace time.

A very important consideration is the loyalty of the troops to the ruler. It is recommended that spies, prostitutes, actors, singers and so on in secret service should be on the look-out for any signs of disaffection among the troops. Trusted army commanders are also expected to keep a watch over men in their charge (5.3.47). It may be presumed that any one suspected of disloyalty would be severely dealt with. Deserters from the army when it is mobilised and assembled in the camp are to be imprisoned (10.1.16).

There is some confusion regarding the position of the *senāpati*. Ordinarily, he is the highest officer in the army. He is expected to be an expert in all kinds of warfare and able to use appropriate tactics on the battle-field and he is apparently to be in command of all the troops on the battle-field (2.33.9-11). However, in the war chapters in one place the *senāpati* appears subordinate to the *nāyaka*, who has ten *senāpatīs* under him (10.6.45). This *senāpati* is a junior officer and therefore different from the usual dignitary of that name. The confusion may be due to a difference in the sources utilised in this text.

When full precautions have been taken and preparations completed for a military expedition, the ruler is advised to set up a base camp. This is to be a strongly fortified encampment with a rampart and a moat all round (10.1.1). It is obvious that such a camp can be set up in one's own territory, not in that of the enemy against whom the war-like preparations are made. The setting up of such a camp would clearly take a long time and that would certainly alert the enemy against whom the expedition is contemplated. Presumably, however, steps for defending his territory likely to be taken by him would not be such as to deter the would-be-conqueror. It is noteworthy that the encampment, where the troops would be staying for quite some time, is to provide not only for traders, but also for prostitutes (10.1.10).

A very unethical practice is suggested at one place for cheating the soldiers of their due wages. It is stated that at the time of the start of the expedition secret agents disguised as traders should offer to the soldiers goods at double the regular price, to be paid, however, only at the end of the campaign. The soldiers are apparently expected to agree to the double price (to be paid only later) hoping that they would in the meanwhile acquire booty during the campaign. The purpose of this procedure is said to be the disposal of state goods lying in the stores as well as the recovery of the wages paid to the soldiers (5.3.42-44). It is clear that the proceeding recommended is extremely unfair to those who are ready to risk their lives for the ruler and the state.

For starting on an expedition there are certain appropriate seasons, depending on the likely duration of the campaign in view. For a campaign of long duration the month of Mārgasīrṣa is recommended for starting when the yet unharvested monsoon

crops on the enemy's lands can be utilised. The month to start on a short campaign is Jyestha, while that for one of middling duration is Chaitra. In these cases, too, the enemy's spring and winter crops can be used to provision the army (9.1.34-36). The months are determined also by the consideration of avoiding the rainy season for fighting. However, it is recommended that if conditions are favourable to the operations of one's own troops and unfavourable to those of the enemy, a campaign may be undertaken even during the rains (9.1.39). It is also conceived as possible that a long campaign may not be successfully concluded before the onset of the rains. Camping on the territory of the enemy during the monsoon is recommended in that case (9.1.52).

The army is to start on its expedition from the base camp referred to above. It is necessary that a calculation should be made before hand of the number of halts likely on the way and of the supplies of fodder, fuel and water available at those stops, and in accordance with that the sites for temporary camps should be determined (10.2.1). A sort of camp-superintendent, called *praśāstr*, is to march ahead of the army with labourers and set up these temporary camps and make provision for the supply of water there (10.1.17). As to provisions and equipment for the army, these are to be carried along with the troops, though living on the land through which the army is to march is also contemplated (10.2.2-3). When the army is on the march, the commandant, *nāyaka*, is to march at the head, the king is to be in the middle and the commander-in-chief, *senāpati*, is to bring up the rear (10.2.4).

It is clear that the king, the *vijigīṣu*, is expected to be with the army in person. But neither at the encampment nor during the march nor in the disposition of the troops before the start of the fighting is he to be right in front. In the fortified encampment his quarters are in the centre, while on the march he is in the middle and at the start of the fighting he himself is to be in a well-guarded part of the battle-array. In the last case the king's double is to be positioned at the head of the array with a view to misleading the enemy troops (10.3.39-42). Elsewhere it is specified that the king's position should be with the reserves which are stationed in the rear of the battle-array at a distance of two hundred *dhanuses* (roughly four hundred yards) (10.5.58).

War, *yuddha* says Kautilya, is of three kinds, open (*prakāsa*), covert (*kūṭa*) and silent (*tūṣṇīm*) (7.6.17, 40-41). There is besides *mantrayuddha*, fighting with diplomacy (Ch. 12.2).

Open war is fighting at the place and the time indicated (7.6.40). Such an open fight, of which due notice has been given, is called *dharmistha*, righteous (10.3.26). Obviously, the site selected for the battle would be favourable to the would-be-conqueror. It is recommended that the site selected should be such that there is some kind of fortification in the rear on which one can fall back in case of need and in which

reserves are to be stationed (10.2.20). For the fight the army is to be arranged in what is called a *vyūha* or battle-array. The text describes a number of different types of battle-arrays (Ch. 10.6). A *vyūha* normally has a centre, two flanks and two wings. Each of these five sections is ordinarily to have an equal number of fighting units, anywhere from nine to twenty-one. It seems that a fighting unit is based either on an elephant or a chariot,¹ with five horsemen and fifteen foot-soldiers in front and fifteen foot-soldiers behind. Thus in an army with nine units in each section, there would be forty-five elephants or chariots, two hundred and twenty-five horsemen, six hundred and seventy-five foot-soldiers in front and an equal number of foot-soldiers behind (10.5.9-13). However, in accordance with different circumstances, the employment of only one of the four types of troops or of a combination of one or more of them is also recommended. In the rear of the *vyūha*, at a distance of two hundred *dhanuses* from it are to be stationed the reserves, which is where the king also stays while the fight is going on (10.5.58).

Behind the troops arranged for a fight physicians and surgeons are to take their stand with medicines, instruments, ointments and bandages for treating the wounded. By their side are to be women with food and drink for the soldiers. The women are also expected to encourage the soldiers to fight (10.3.47). These women are not nurses in the modern sense.

On the eve of the battle the king is advised to fast and offer a sacrifice with *mantras* from the Atharvaveda and to spend the night beside his weapons and vehicles (10.3.34-35). Before the start of the fight he should get together the troops and exhort them, saying that he himself is only a servant of the state like them (10.3.27). Moreover, the excellencies of the battle-array should be pointed out to them; prophecies of victory should be made to them by astrologers; bards should praise the heroism of the troops, speaking of attainment of heaven by the brave (10.3.32-33,44). At the same time the *senāpati* is to announce rewards for outstanding acts of bravery during the fight; 100,000 *papas* for killing the enemy king, 50,000 for killing the *senapati* or a prince and so on down to 20 *papas* for killing an ordinary soldier. It should also be announced that everyone would be allowed to keep what he is able to seize and would at the end of the fight receive a double wage as gratuity. Officers are expected to make a note of exploits by soldiers in their respective units (10.3.45-46).

It is laid down that during a fight safety should be given to the following; those who have fallen down (*patita*), those who have turned their back on the fight (*parāṇmukha*) those who surrender (*abhipanna*), those whose hair are loose apparently as a mark of submission (*muktakesa*), those who have abandoned their weapons (*muktasastra*) those whose appearance is changed through fear (*bhayavirupa*) and non-combatants (*ayudhymāna*) (13.4.52). These are rules of what is usually called *dharmayuddha*.

Open fighting, *prakāsayuddha*, is recommended when one is stronger than the enemy, when the terrain and the season are favourable to oneself and when measures have been taken to sow dissension in the enemy ranks. But when one is weaker or finds the terrain and the season unfavourable, one may resort to what is called *kūṭayuddha* or covert fighting. (10.3.1–2). The essence of this kind of fighting lies in misleading enemy troops or finding them off guard and attacking them when they are at a disadvantage. The following are some of the tactics to be used in this kind of fighting : feign a retreat and thus draw the enemy troops to an unfavourable terrain, then turn round and attack them, feign a rout and manage to get the enemy ranks divided when they are in pursuit, then turn round and attack the divided ranks; attack on one flank in force and when the enemy troops are pressed back, attack on the other flank; attack first with inferior troops to tire the enemy out, then attack with superior troops; keep the enemy troops awake by engaging them at night, then attack in force the next day when they are sleepy or fatigued; make a sudden attack at night with elephants when the enemy troops are asleep; attack when the sun and the wind are directly in the face of the enemy troops; and so on (10.3.3–23). It is quite clear that by *kūṭayuddha* are understood those tactics on the battle-field which are used everywhere and at all times as a matter of course, and no fault can be found with them in any evaluation of the teaching of this text.

Each of the four types of troops—cavalry, infantry, chariots and elephants—has its own special modes of fighting and its own special functions during war, whether open or covert. The text enumerates a very large number of these modes of fighting and functions (10.4.13–16) and 10.5.53–56). For example, elephants are useful for breaking up ranks in an array, for a night assault, for inspiring terror in enemy troops, for breaking down gates, for trampling and destroying and so on. Kautilya has stated elsewhere that success in war principally depends on elephants (2.2.13) and he thinks that elephants alone may be able to secure victory (*ekāṅgavijaya*). Chariots are useful, among other things, for guarding one's own troops, for breaking up enemy ranks or re-uniting one's own broken ranks, for creating a terrific din, for fighting from a stationary position and so on. Cavalry is of use in carrying out raids, for penetrating and breaking through enemy ranks, for pursuing the fleeing enemy, for turning back after feigning retreat, for rallying one's own troops, for reconnoitring and so on. Infantry of course, is to bear the main burden of fighting and killing.

Kautilya sometimes refers to *nimnayuddha* and *sthalayuddha*, to *khanakayuddha* and *ākāsayuddha* (2.33.8) etc.). Of these *sthalayuddha*, is fighting on land and *akasayuddha* is fighting in the open, which practically amounts to the same thing as *sthalayuddha*; it is so called because of its antithesis to *khanakayuddha*, fighting from an entrenched position. With *nimna* understood as 'water' by the commentators, *nimnayuddha* would be fighting in water. There is, however, no description of a

navy or naval warfare in the usual sense in this text. Possibly fighting carried on by elephants, cavalry and even infantry, taking their position in some river is to be understood, though fighting from boats is quite conceivable.

One of the modes of fighting mentioned in connection with the infantry is *upāmsudanda* 'silent punishment', which is apparently the same as the *tūsnimjuddha* referred to as the third kind of war. This is not part of either open fighting or covert fighting. It is killing or assassination, particularly of high military officers of the enemy when the two armies are not actually engaged in fighting. This type of 'fighting' is recommended to the weak king when he is attacked by a powerful enemy who refuses to entertain any offers for preserving peace and persists in marching against him. In the section called *senamukhyavadha* (Chs. 12.2-3) a number of ways are described for bringing about the death of high military and civil officers of the enemy by the use of weapons or poison through secret agents. The enemy king, too, may be trapped and assassinated (12.5.1-8). When it is borne in mind that this sort of 'fighting' called *tūsnimjuddha* is meant for the weak king, who is the victim of aggression by a powerful neighbour who has spurned all offers of peace and negotiations, no serious objections can be raised against its recommendation.

Before resorting to 'silent war' the weak king is advised to try *mantrayuddha* war with the help of diplomacy. Through an ambassador, *dūta*, he should offer terms of peace to the aggressor by the surrender of troops or treasury or land, if need be by the surrender of the whole kingdom with the exception of the capital city (12.1.24-34). If the aggressor were to refuse to accept any of these terms and to persist in his march, an appeal may be made to his regard for *dharma* and *artha*, his spiritual and material well-being. He may also be threatened with likely action by other members of the circle of kings going to the help of the weak king in order to preserve the balance of power and to prevent any single member from growing too strong (12.2.1-7). This is called *mantrayuddha*.

The weak king, instead of giving a fight on the open plains may choose to entrench himself in a fort. It would then be necessary to conquer the fort by laying siege to it. The procedure for doing so and for storming the fort if necessary is described at length (Ch.13.4). Before actually laying siege, various stratagems may be tried to seduce the enemy's officers and subjects from their loyalty to him (Ch.13.1), for luring the enemy king out of the fort and assassinating him (13.2), for smuggling one's troops into the fort or luring the garrison out of the fort (13.3). When all such tactics fail, the fort may be stormed and captured. In this connection the text refers to setting fire to objects or places inside the fort from the outside and gives recipes for incendiary preparations (13.4.14-21).

The conquest of a territory may mean its annexation or the submission of its ruler as a vassal. That will depend on the would-be-conqueror. Three types of conquerors are mentioned-the righteous conqueror, *dharmavijayin*, who is satisfied with submission and acceptance of his suzerainty, the greedy conqueror, *lobhavijayin*, who is out to acquire land and money, and the demoniac conqueror, *asuravijayin*, who is out to seize land and money as well as the sons and wives of the conquered kings and is bent on killing these kings (12.1.10-16). It is clear that the last type of conqueror would invariably annex the conquered territories, the second type can be induced to desist from annexation by the offer of money, while the first type is not interested in annexation at all. He is content with mere acceptance of his suzerainty.

This in brief is an outline of Kautilya's teaching on war and its aims. He has concerned himself at length with offensive as well as defensive war, and thus presents a complete picture of war as it may be assumed to have been conducted in ancient India. Because of the radical difference between the army units of those days and modern armies, and their modes of fighting, many details of the teaching of this text might appear to be without relevance to-day. Nevertheless, the basic principles underlying its teaching-that a careful consideration of all factors is necessary before engaging in offensive war, that full preparations must be made and all precautions taken before starting the war, that in actual fighting tactics for misleading the enemy and catching him off guard are necessary, that diplomacy has an important role to play, particularly when on the defensive, and so on-have as much relevance to-day as they had when this text was written. At the time of the Chinese aggression against India in 1962 it was stated that Mao Tse Tung was strongly influenced by Sun Tzu's classic "The Art of war" which was written roughly at about the same time as the *Kautilya Arthasāstra*. The essence of its teaching, which not at all as exhaustive as that in the *Arthasāstra*, is that all warfare is based on deception and that what is of importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy. Perhaps a study of Kautilya's teaching by military leaders would be more helpful.
