

# A COMPARATIVE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MILITARY ADMINISTRATION OF THE ANCIENT PERIOD AND THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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## ABSTRACT

The ‘military administration’ is always considered an integral and formidable part of a country. It reflects not only the defensive force, but also measures the parameter of a country’s indomitable strength. Today’s India’s security force is a great legacy of our past. It identifies the technique of management meant for our safety zone. Its role in the society is equivalent to public administration as it is the cynosure of our civil society. Military administration is applied in a very wide range as civil, political, bureaucrats are all interlinked with it. It is the key to the security of a country.

KEY WORDS – military, administration, defensive, technique, civil, security.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the legacy of Indian administrations is the military administration of Ancient and Medieval era. In the past, war was an integral part of our administration. So maintenance of a formidable force was the priority of any kingdom. Internal revolt, external expansion, foreign aggression, maintenance of law and order – all depended upon army administration. Our history is memorable for two great epic wars- Ramayana and Mahabharata. Harappan civilization to later Vedic period were marked with simple war tactics but lacked the concept of organized army. The Mauryan administration categorized army into different wings and so did the Guptas and other Southern rulers. But the augmentation of Medieval era marked the centralisation of the army. The Sultanate and Mughal rulers emphasized on different wings placed under efficient in – charge. Training, inspection, discipline and payment of the army were taken into consideration under Mughal ruler. Thus a transitional period can be observed in the military administration from Ancient period to Medieval period

## ARMY ORGANISATION IN THE ANCIENT PERIOD

Indian mode of warfare took its shape with two great epic wars of Indian history-‘Ramayana’ and ‘Mahabharata’.

During the Vedic period, the mode of war was specifically clan based. They were specifically interested in inheriting the land near the river Indus and its principal tributaries. The idea of ‘expansion of territories’ was subjugated and mainly concentrated in defending their clans or communities like Bharatas and Purus. The Aryans were equipped with well breed horses and arms like coats of nail (Varman) and so emerged victorious in all the wars against the original inhabitants like Dasyus and Panis. Gopa Janasysa or Gopati Janasya was considered as the protectorate of the territory. (Jha, 1997)

The Later-Vedic era was marked with the development of some strong kingdoms like Kosala, Kashi, Videha, Kalinga, Magadha etc and also some republics (Samgha or Gana ) like Urika , the Damini , the Yaudheya etc .The ‘ Senani ‘ was the supreme commander of the army .The kings army consisted of the Aryan nobles and commoners who served as archers , slingers , rock-throwers , cavalymen , chariot-drivers , elephant-riders etc. Chakras and arrows were believed to be the ‘magical weapons’. The Kshatriyas were considered to be the valiant workers who considered sacrificing their life to be a honorary service.

Thus we can conclude that the concept of ‘organised military’ organization was lacking during the Vedic and Post-Vedic period .

The Mauryan army organization adopted a systematic effort to centralize the army administration. It can be clearly understood from the division of the army and appointing a war offices that consisted of 6 boards of five each, together consisted of thirty members. The divisions were as follows- admiralty; transport, commissariat and army service; infantry; cavalry; chariots and elephants as mentioned in the Arthashastra. (Tripathi, 1942)

The ‘‘Dharma mahattas’’ of Ashokan empire was the strategic position of the army, but it was concentrated more to the spread of the message of ‘‘dharma’’ rather than military contribution.

The Mauryan army administration was perhaps the first organized military organization and they considered army to be an integral part of the empire and also for territorial expansion. The Pre- Mauryan period lacked the concept of organized and systematic division of army. The invasion of Persians and Greeks especially, Alexander’s invasion necessitated for creating a formidable force. Horse was considered as the fastest mode of travel, especially light horse-drawn carriage. (Thapar, 2002)

Unlike the Mauryas, the Guptas did not possess a big organized army. Here, the feudal lords supplied the major portions of the Gupta military organization. The Basarh seal provides ample evidence regarding the working of the Gupta’s military administration. The ministers (mantris) whose office was hereditary, worked both as civil and military officers and also accompanied the king in the battlefield. Mahadanda - nayaka was the chief commandant, Bhatasvapati was the lord of the infantry and the cavalry. Dandapasadhikarana was the office of the police chief.

It seems that the Guptas depended highly on feudal lords for the military strength. The concept of ‘‘organised army’’ which was the base of Mauryan administration was completely lacking during the Gupta period. Thus, we can say that the concept of ‘‘feudalism’’ took its full shape during the Gupta period. It appeared that the Gupta military organization was fragmented and the feudal lords served the military purpose of the centralized administration. The feudal lords became the core of administration which was responsible for the rising of regional states of India during the Post-Gupta period.

Harshavardhana was the first ruler who felt the need to create efficient army and so categorized army into cavalry, infantry, chariot and elephants and also introduced the process of self – inspection. Hieun Tsang provided a detailed description regarding the inspection of Harsha’s army. He inspected his army by riding an elephant. The office of ‘‘Maula bala’’ during Harshavardhana’s time played a significant role. It was a hereditary office where only trained and efficient warriors were recruited. It was a multi – tasking force which served as vanguards, as guards of the palaces, as standing army in war.

The late Satavahana period culminated a turning point in military administration with the inclusion of ‘ Gulma ‘Gulma was a combined army company’ of nine pattis, amounting to nine chariots, nine elephants, 27 horses and 45 foot soldiers in all. (Kosambi, 1956) They were considered as dispersed minor group which could be effectively used for resistance in villages. But such combined dispersed group was a great contribution to the military strength of the centralized army.

The army organization under the Cholas was modified including an advanced form which made possible the overseas conquest of Rajaraja I and Rajendra I in the Indian ocean and Malay peninsula. Unlike the Mauryas and Guptas who concentrated in the division of the army, the Cholas divided the army, based on the weapons, they used. Infact, not only revamped training were metted out to the soldiers, the Cholas also concentrated on high technique of weapons like – archers ( villigal ), footsoldiers ( valperra kaikkolar ), infantry of the right – hand ( velaikkarar of the valangai ), chosen horsemen ( kudiraiccevarar ), elephant corps ( anaiyatkal, kunjira mallar ) etc. Millitary training and discipline of the army was maintained in cantonment called kadagams.

The concept ‘‘navy’’ was an added term that came into existence during the Pala dynasty. This 5<sup>th</sup> wing was added to the military organization as the Pala kingdom was surrounded by rivers and so emphasized on fighting boats.

The term ‘‘centralized army’’ was a Post –Mauryan concept. The post-mauryan army was heterogeneous in character recruiting soldiers from all categories – Brahmin, Vaishya, Kshatriya, Shudra and Mlecha or from mixed castes. They lacked proper training and were not well- equipped, but obeyed the orders of the king. According to K.A Nizami, ‘‘The Rajput army which mainly consisted of feudal lords – raised by different Rajput leaders, trained under different conditions and employed on different terms – lacked unity of purpose and fought individual glory.’’

Thus we can conclude that war during pre – vedic and post – vedic period was homogenous in character. Their territorial expansion was limited and lacked the guerilla mode of warfare. It seemed that their interest was internal security rather expansion of territory. The mode of war was class based and tribes and communities played a significant role. The reasons for war were mainly cattle, tribal principalities, caste etc. The war was basically between Aryans and the original inhabitants of the community like – Dasas, Panis, Dasyus etc whom the Aryans and Brahmins considered as outcastes. Their mode of warfare like – archers, slingers, rock – throwers etc were simple in nature. Only the Aryans used chariots drawn by horses and coats of nail (varman) and so they were victorious in every sphere. So, the term’’ military organization’’ is not applicable to Pre – Vedic and Vedic period.

The ‘‘ Mauryan’’ and ‘‘Post – Mauryan’’ periods were transitional as the term ‘military organization’ is applicable. Chandragupta Mauryan was the first ruler who introduced systematic categorization of army. Perhaps the Greek and Persian invasions and their modern tactics necessitated the demand for mechanization. But the Gupta period marked the lacking of organization of military administration as the emperor depended highly on feudal lords. The concept ‘feudal’ came into existence during the Gupta period. The nobles, governors and princess were suppose to maintain huge army which they supplied to the centre when emergency demands. Thus it seems that the concept of military organization was forceful during Mauryan period rather than Gupta period. Overall, the concept of division and creating individual offices in the army took a turning point. But still the armies were lacking discipline, military tactics, training, use of modern warfare during the Mauryan and Post – Gupta period that necessitated the development of regional states.

## ARMY ORGANISATION IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The Medieval autocratic rulers and their power depended highly on their military department. The entire Medieval period was marked by internal revolt, Mongol invasion, imperialists expansion and foreign invasions. So maintaining a formidable force was the first requirement of the Medieval rulers. The military organization of the Medieval period was based mainly on the Turkish model. The first Turkish ruler of Delhi who introduced the concept of military organization of the Sultanate was Iltutmish. He created an army that was centrally recruited, centrally paid and centrally administered. But it was Alauddin Khilji who felt the need of a strong centralized military organization and so made effort to recruit them directly in the central administration. Akbar took a step forward and entered into matrimonial alliances with different kingdoms especially the ‘Rajputs’ to strengthen the army.

## GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE ARMY UNDER MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The army of the Medieval period consisted of infantry, cavalry and elephants. But the most formidable and effective section of the army was the cavalry. The cavalries were supplied with branded horses that were imported from distant foreign countries like Arabia, Turkistan etc. For effective result and convenience, four divisions of the army, namely, the centre, the left, the right and the reserved were maintained. The central army was provided with trained elephants and specific spaces were maintained among foot soldiers.

The army was designated with various titles like amirs, khans, maliks to mark their military gradation based on their works.

The derivation of soldiers was from diverse religion and sects such as – the Afghans, the Abyssinians, the Persians, the Mongols, the Arabs, the Turks, the Hindus and the Indian Musalmans. (Jackson, 1999). Different reasons could be attributed for those recruitments – increasing the quantity and quality of soldiers, maintenance of a formidable standing army and reluctance of the ruler to provide a national character to the army.

Two methods were adopted for the payment of soldiers based on their ranks and services. In this connection the term ‘‘Iqtadari’’ system should be taken into consideration. The term ‘‘Iqta’’ came into existence during the reign of Iltutmish. The military officers like nobles, governors and princess were assigned iqtas, which was a hereditary ownership of land. They collected revenue on their terms and in lieu of this supplied efficient army to the emperor according to the demand. Other troops were paid in cash. One to ten thousand tankas were paid to petty military officers based on their strength.

Balban emphasized on quality and quantity of the army and also adopted a new strategy called ‘‘defensive security’’. He created a defensive line across the region of Lahore, Multan and Dipalpur placed under Prince Muhammad and another across Sunam Samana and Bhatinda placed under his youngest son, Prince Bughra Khan. Thus he emphasized on the military strength of the army on defensive lines.

## DESIGNATION AND SERVICES OF THE DELHI SULTANATE ARMY

The Sultan created a centralized army for the administration. Those soldiers who were recruited by the centre constituted the army called ‘‘Khasah – Khail’’. The cavalry was divided into two offices – soldiers who kept only one horse were called ‘‘Sawars’’ and those who kept two horses were called ‘‘Do – aspa’’. ‘‘Sar-i-Khail’’ was the officer in-charge of the unit consisted of ten horsemen. ‘‘Sipahasalar’’ was the commanding officer of ten ‘‘Sar-i-khail’’. An ‘‘Amir’’ was the commanding officer of over ten units of ‘‘Siphasalars’’. A ‘‘Malik’’ was the officer in-charge of ten amirs and a ‘‘Khan’’ in-charge of ten maliks. ‘‘Sar-i-jandar’’ was the officer in-charge of bodyguards and the bodyguards under the Delhi Sultanate were called Jandars. The office of the ‘‘Amir-i-akhur’’ (the master of horses) was held by dignitaries like the Turkish Malik. During the reign of Razia Sultana, she appointed an Abyssinian, Jamal-ud-din Yakut to this post which was responsible for the tussle between Razia and other offices and ultimately brought her downfall.

The term ‘‘Iqta’’ referred to those noble officers and governors who were assigned the land in lieu of maintaining military troops. They were to extract revenue from this land for their salary and maintaining this formidable force. Their task was to join the central army when demanded.



Alauddin was the first Delhi ruler who introduced the most revolutionary and precautionary measures in the form of ‘‘Dagh’’ and ‘‘Huliya’’ in the military administration. Dagh indicated ‘branding of horses’ and huliya signified ‘descriptive rolls of soldiers’. He also constructed a new town ‘Siri’ which was used as garrison town.

#### DIWAN-I-ARZ

This is the office of military affairs of Delhi Sultanate. Arz-i-mamalik was the head of this ministry. He was assigned the task of recruitment in the army, prepared descriptive rolls of soldiers and the horses, inspected the troops at least once in a year, maintained discipline in the army, took care of the equipments for the forces, maintained muster rolls and revised the salaries annually and was in-charge of all preparations during military campaigns. (Chandra, 1997)

All the above mentioned sub-sections were placed under the supervision of the ‘‘Diwan-i- arz’’.

#### DESIGNATION AND SERVICES OF THE MUGHAL ARMY

The Mughal army consisted of sub-sections like-Dakhili troops who were directly managed by the state, the Ahadis were considered as the personal contingent of the emperor, the Barwardi were armed police to assist in rent collection, the Kumakis were those auxiliaries whose services were lent at the time of war to mansabdars, gunners and musketeers.

A revolutionary step in military administration was adopted by Akbar with the introduction of ‘‘Mansabdari’’ system. The term ‘‘Mansab’’ signified ‘‘rank’’ or ‘‘place’’ which mean holder of ranks in the administration. Throughout the Mughal period, the lowest rank was 10 and highest rank was 50,000. The ranks were further divided into ‘‘Zat’’ and ‘‘Sawar’’ ranks. (Chandra, Medieval India, From Sultanat To The Mughals, Part Two Mughal Empire (1526 - 1748), 1999). The former got fixed personal status and later indicated the number of cavalymen supposed to maintain by a person.

‘‘Mansabdars’’ were holders of ranks below 500 zat, ‘‘Amirs’’ were holders of more than 500 but below 2500 zats and ‘‘Amir – i – umda’’ or ‘‘Amir – i - azam’’ or ‘‘Omrahs’’ were holders of 2500 zats and above. Again ‘‘Zabti’’ (the law of escheat) was enforced on those mansabdars whose property was confiscated by the emperors after his death.

The ‘‘Dagh’’ system was introduced by Akbar which meant the maintenance of soldier through a descriptive roll (Chehra) and imperial marks was inscribed on his horses. Jahangir introduced two innovative steps in Mansabdari system – i) Du-aspa which meant troops who possessed two horses and ‘‘Sih – aspa’’ who possessed three horses. ‘‘Naqdi’’ were those who received pay in cash and jagirdars were those who were paid through assignment of jagirs.

#### MIR BAKSHI

All the above sub- sections were placed under Mir Bakshi. He was the head of all military establishments. He was responsible for appointment of mansabs, enforced code of conduct for the army, maintained an enrollment register of mansabdars, supervised branding of horses of the mansabdars, acted as pay master and also all salary bills used to pass through his office.

But in spite of this military nature, we can trace a series of shortcomings during the Medieval period. The Medieval rulers followed the same division of the army into cavalry, infantry etc, but failed to provide technical training to different wings. They should have emphasized on varied technical training and mode of warfare to different wings. They also failed to equip their soldiers with modern means of warfare. Again recruitment of soldiers from all sects like – Afghans, Mughals, Arabs etc opened the path of revolutionary group among the troops. Depending on feudal lords for the supply of army was another weakness as they always tried to curb out their own principalities. Taj-ud-din Yaloz, Governor of Kirman; the nobles of Turkan-i-chahalgani of Iltutmish’s reign, Alauddin Khilji, Governor of Kara of Jalal-ud-din Khilji’s reign, Kamran, Hindal and Askari, the three brothers of Humayun revolted against the central administration. The most defective episode that weakened not only the central character of the army but was also responsible for emptied treasure was ‘‘Iqtadari’’ system. The holders of ‘‘Iqtas’’ were called ‘‘muqtis’’.

To sum up, the phenomena of maintaining army from Ancient period to Medieval period visualized a drastic change. The ancient period army was maintained specifically for maintaining internal security, but Medieval army was meant for territorial expansion. The era of two epic war to Vedic civilization visualized simple army organization equipped with simple weapons like bows, arrows, stone throwers etc. Moreover divisions of army into sub-divisions started reflecting during the Mauryan period when the rulers divided army into various wings. Division of army indicated appointment of efficient soldiers in each wings. Whereas the Medieval phase always emphasized on maintaining a formidable force for their existence in a foreign land like India. Right from the coming of Muhammad Ghori to Aurangzeb, they struggled hard with Indian rulers and also foreign invaders like – the Mongols, Timurs etc. So they maintained divisions of the army into cavalry, infantry, foot soldiers like ‘‘Dagh’’, ‘‘Huliya’’ etc. These trainings were completely absent during the Ancient period. Appointment of in – charges for heading different sections was also a unique feature of the Medieval period that was lacking during the Ancient period. Periodical

inspection of horses and elephants were all additions of Medieval period which were absent in Ancient period. Payment of army and equipping them with horses and elephants were organised based on their ranks and positions during Medieval period but these were all lacking during the Ancient period.

Thus the military administrations experienced phenomenal reforms from Ancient period to Medieval period.

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