

Kautilya to Chandragupta on the Mauryan Soldier

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Kautilya in his treatise on Statecraft : *Arthashastra* dwells on the Mauryan Army and has in many places sought to advise the *Rajadhiraja* on myriad aspects of the duties and responsibilities of the Head of State.

While heading the Air Force Pay Commission Cell, in 1995 at my personal request, a Sanskrit scholar in the Benares Hindu University researched and gave me some excerpts in bits and pieces, which were put together as a cohesive whole for inclusion in the Armed Forces Memorandum to the 5th Pay Commission. Since then, I have taken the liberty of superimposing / interjecting a little more to what has been said on the same subject in the *Neeti-Shataka*, by the sage-king Bhartruhari.

It is amazing how clearly those ancients saw the likely faultlines in governance, the intricacies of management of the military by the state functionaries, the nature of the military and the citizenry and the close interplay between them all. It is truly amazing how those observations continue to be so completely relevant today, even after 2000 years.

The passage underneath on 'The Mauryan Army' is actually an anthology of some of those 'dwellings'.

The Mauryan Army

"The Mauryan soldier does not himself the Royal treasuries enrich nor does he the Royal granaries fill. He does not himself carry out trade and commerce nor produce scholars, thinkers, littérateurs, artistes, artisans, sculptors, architects, craftsmen, doctors and administrators. He does not himself build roads and ramparts nor dig wells and reservoirs. He does not himself write poetry and plays, paint or sculpt, nor delve in metaphysics, arts and sciences.

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He does not do any of this directly as he is neither gifted, trained nor mandated to do so.

The soldier only and merely ensures that:

The tax, tribute and revenue collectors travel far and wide unharmed and return safely;

The farmer tills, grows, harvests, stores and markets his produce unafraid of pillage & plunder;

The trader, merchant and moneylender function and travel across the length and breadth of the realm unmolested;

The savant, sculptor, painter, maestro and master create works of art, literature, philosophy, astronomy and astrology in peace & quietitude;

The architect designs and builds his Vaastus without tension;

The tutor ('*acharya*'), the mentor ('*guru*') and the priest ('*purohit*') teach and preach in tranquility;

The sages ('*rishis, munis, and tapaswees*') meditate and undertake penance in wordless silence;

The doctor ('*vaidyaraja*') tends to the ill and the infirm well, adds to the pharmacopoeia, discovers new herbs and invents new medical formulations undisturbed;

The mason, the bricklayer, the artisan, the weaver, the tailor, the jeweller, the potter, the carpenter, the cobbler, the cowherd ('*gopaala*') and the smith work unhindered;

The mother, wife and governess go about their chores and bring up children in harmony and tranquility;

The aged and the disabled are well taken care of, tended to and are able to fade away gracefully and with dignity; cattle graze freely without being lifted or harmed by miscreants.

He is thus the VERY BASIS and silent, barely visible CORNERSTONE of our fame, culture, physical well being and prosperity; in short, of the entire nation building activity. He DOES NOT perform any of these chores himself directly: he ENABLES

the rest of us to perform these without let, hindrance or worry ('*nirbhheek and nishchinta*').

Our military sinews, on the other hand, lend credibility to our pronouncements of adherence to good *Dharma*, our goodwill, amiability and peaceful intentions towards all our neighbour nations ('*sarve bhavantu sukhinaha, sarve santu niramayaha...*') as also those far away and beyond. These also serve as a powerful deterrent against military misadventure by any one of them against us.

If Pataliputra reposes each night in peaceful comfort, O King, it is so because she is secure in the belief that the distant borders of Magadha are inviolate and the interiors are safe and secure, thanks to the mighty Mauryan Army constantly patrolling and standing vigil with naked swords and eyes peeled for action ('*animish netre*'), day and night ('*ratrau-divase*'), in weather fair and foul, dawn-to-dusk-to-dawn ('*ashtau prahare*'), quite unmindful of personal discomfort and hardship, loss of life and limb, separation from the family, all through the year, year after year ('*warsha nu warshe*').

While the *Magadha citizenry endeavours* to make the State prosper and flourish, the *Mauryan soldier guarantees* that the State continues to EXIST! He is the silent '*sine qua non*' of our very being!

To this man, O *Rajadhiraja*, you owe a debt for that very guarantee which is the vital *key-stone* of our nationhood *arch*. Please, therefore, see to it, *suo motu*, that you are *constantly* alive and sensitive to the soldier's legitimate dues in every form and respect, be those his needs or his wants, including his place in the social order. Do thereafter ('*tadanantara*') ensure that he receives these *in time or preferably ahead of time*, in full measure, *for he is NOT likely to ask for them himself*.

This is so because before getting so completely wrapped up in his onerous, harsh and exalted charge, the soldier has assumed with good reason that the State, in return for his extraordinary burden and services, has freed him from all responsibility towards his own present and future welfare as also that of his family back home in the hinterland. He is thus very clear in his mind when deployed at a distant border outpost, fighting lumpen groups within

Magadha or when campaigning in far away lands that he need only look out in FRONT for the enemy of the State and concentrate only on his MILITARY ONUS and aim (*'shatrunjaya'*), completely free of all temporal worries. This assumption is a holy sacrament and an unwritten covenant that exists between him and the State. *And rightly so!*

If ever things come to a sordid pass, O King, when, on a given day, the Mauryan soldier has to LOOK BACK over his shoulder (*'Simhawalokana'*) prompted by even a single nagging worry about his and his family's material, physical and social well being, it should cause you and your Council the greatest concern and distress! I beseech you to take instant note and act with uncommon dispatch to address the soldier's anxiety. It could be on account of harsh living conditions, inequitable material compensation or asymmetric Court or societal dispensations affecting either his self respect or his family's material welfare, or both.

If any in your household, in your Council or among your courtiers is/ are responsible for allowing matters to come to such a pass, punish him/ them exemplarily without loss of time and send him/ them to serve for four cycles of seasons (*'Chaturrutuchakre'*) alongside the soldiers, on the border outposts. If they perish, those would be their just desserts. If they survive, they will return wiser and wizened, more responsive to and with greater empathy for the soldier's cause.

If you first learn of your soldiers' problems and needs from your own trusted informers (*'gupt doota'*) and NOT from the Commander-in-Chief (*'Senapati'*) himself, relieve him of his charge and retain him not for another day. No matter how good a horseman (*'Ashwarohi'*), a swordsman (*'Khadgaveera'*), a wrestler (*'Malla'*), an archer (*'Dhanurdhara'*) or a tactician (*'Rana neetigya'*) he is, dismiss him (*'ardha chandra prayoga'*) for failing to keep his ear close to the military ground. Dismiss him also for not having the gumption and courage to be the first to tell you of the soldiers' anxiety and needs before the others do. The *Senapati* owes a downward loyalty and sensitivity to his troops in much the same way and measure as he owes these upwards to you, for this is a unique and age-old essential feature of sound military leadership and an article of faith between the troops and the General!

It is my bounden duty to caution you, My Lord, that the day when the Mauryan soldier has to *demand* his dues or, worse, *plead* for them, will neither have arrived suddenly, overnight nor in vain. It will also bode ill for Magadha.

For then, on that day, you, My Lord, will have lost all moral sanction to be *Rajadhiraja* ! It will also mark the beginning of the end of the Mauryan Empire!!"