

Module - I

Military History of Ancient India



Note



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3

MILITARY ETHOS

You have learnt the manner in which ancient Indians organized their armies from a small unit called the Patti to large armies, which had hundreds of chariots, elephants, cavalry and foot soldiers. Large armies also required a Commissariat to look after their logistic needs of food, clothing etc; and since ancient Indians had known and held war ships, they even thought about an Admiralty. Such an army was required to be disciplined and loyal to the King at all times. Regular armies trained and practised the art of fighting. You also learnt about the difference between strategy and tactics.

In this lesson we shall learn about the ethos, which essentially means the customs and traditions followed by ancient armies. Ethos means, the way a soldier or the unit behaves in war as well as in public life. For e.g. a soldier is disciplined, he is honest, armies are loyal to the country and the King. You will learn about the important traditions of the army such as carrying the Flag or Dhwaj, use of martial music and the courage and valour displayed by soldiers in the battlefield. Present day armies, the world over, follow some of these customs even today.



Objectives

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the importance of a flag or Dhwaj as a symbol of importance;
- explain the importance of martial music for the soldiers in wars and
- illustrate the bravery of the Indian soldier.

3.1 Flag or Dhwaj

A flag had come to be recognized as an important symbol and was carried by kings in battle. The flag, also called the "Standard", became a recognition of a King and in turn, also became a recognition of the army. From the days of the Rig Veda, the one symbol that commanded respect and loyalty of the people was the flag. Even today the Indian flag is the most respected symbol for all Indians everywhere. Poets have glorified the flag as more valuable than the King. It was an object of national honour and pride.



Note

Flag bearers carried the Flag to the battlefield. It was considered the greatest honour to defend it. For the armies fighting a battle, it was important to capture the flag of the opponent because that would symbolize victory. It must be remembered that in ancient times there was flag of the king and also each division of the army had its own flag and it was carried on the chariot or the elephants.

Apart from the flag, Kings used emblems. These were depictions of animals such as boar, lion etc, South Indian Kings used pictures of fish, tiger, bow in their flags.

THREE ANCIENT TAMIL EMPIRES

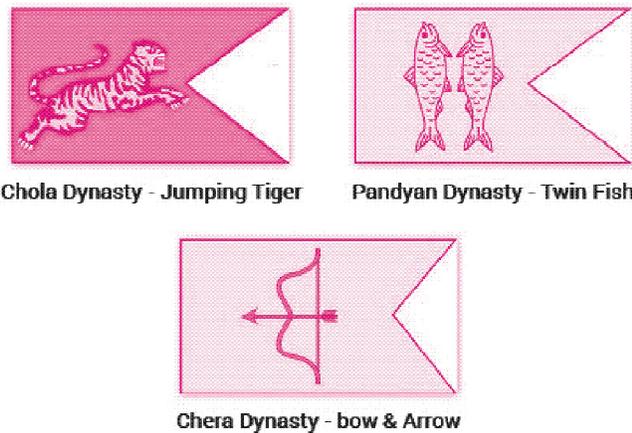


Fig. 3.1 Flag

The same picture as that on a flag was also used as an emblem on the official seal or coin. A pennant was a triangle shaped flag, which was used on chariots, cavalry and even elephants. Pennants were coloured cloth and were used to differentiate between two armies in the battlefield.

3.2 War Music

Musical instruments for war find mention in Rig Veda Samhita, implying that they were of importance in warfare. These instruments were used only for festive occasions or in war. Vedic literature mentions war drums of three types. Instruments were designed for religious festivals, cultural and art demonstrations and some exclusively for use in the battlefield. Why were they required for the soldiers? Drums and music provided inspiration to the soldiers to be brave and fight ferociously.



Fig. 3.2 War Drum horn or Nagara



Note

An instrument such as Dundubhi was used to wake up troops at dawn, signify the end of a day's fighting at dusk or commence fighting at the designated hour. Like the Dundubhi, conch or shank was also used extensively in battle. The use of conch shells slowly faded with time and was replaced by other instrument such as a trumpet.

All armies of the world, even today have military bands, trumpets and bugles as part of their armed forces. Indian army infantry units maintain a band platoon, which is used to play martial music to motivate troops and also to train them in marching. In war the soldiers of the band platoon act as paramedics and help wounded soldiers to be evacuated to hospitals.

3.3 Bravery and Valour

The people of India look up to the Indian soldier as the saviour of country frontiers. A good soldier demonstrates qualities of courage, self-sacrifice, integrity, strength of character and commitment to the cause of the Nation. It is therefore, the duty of the Nation to recognise and honour the sacrifice of a soldier. The valour in the soldier is a trait that goes back to ancient times.

Bravery of soldiers has often been described in poems, which form an authentic source of historical evidence. Mothers were described to be proud of their sons joining the army even after the death of their husbands in war. This was considered as the final contribution to the Kingdom.

It is said that Valour, Honour, Pride and Clarity of mind were the four fold traits of a good soldier.



Intext Questions

3.1

1. Who carried the flag to the battlefield?
2. Name any three animals used as a symbol in the flag or emblem.
3. Name any three war music instruments.



What You Have Learnt

- A well-organized army requires certain customs and traditions to be followed so that they fight with motivation and valour.
- Each aspect of the customs and traditions had a particular meaning and became an essential aspect of the battlefield.
- The flag or Dhvaj, war music and musical instruments became a part of the army and an important symbol of war.
- The Kingdoms were recognized by the flags, emblems they created whether as a flag or coin or artefacts.
- The valour of the Indian soldier was second to none. Soldiers' mothers and wives were equally brave and examples of the pride of knowing the death of their sons in the battlefield has been eulogized in a number of poems.



Terminal Exercises

1. What is the difference between a 'Pennant' and a 'Flag'?
2. What was the purpose of playing the 'Dundhubi' or 'War drums' in the battlefield?
3. What are the important qualities of a 'good soldier'?



Answers to Intext Questions

3.1

1. Flag bearers.
2. Fish, Tiger and Lion, bow
3. War drum or Nagara, Conch and Dundubhi.



Note

