C H A P T E R XIV.

THE DATA REGARDING ARMY AND OTHER ALLIED TOPICS.

The poem supplies fairly rich information regarding the army and the other things connected with it. Though some of the descriptions are conventional, they possibly reflect the contemporary period also. It appears from the study of the poem that Māgha has drawn upon the actual surroundings of his own times. This supposition is confirmed by the fact that he mentions a camel as a beast of burden and for riding during the march of the army. The sporadic references to the use of chariots indicate the gradual disappearance of that section from the army. It has been remarked that "Māgha's descriptions of camels are so frequent and lifelike that one is tempted to hazard the inference that Māgha was most probably a native of some place in or near Rajputana where these animals are largely used, for riding and carrying burdens."[1] It will also be clear from the following data that Māgha's treatment of the subject is not so much based on the textbooks of the subject as on the personal observation. It is therefore not possible to subscribe to the view of Dr.Keith that the army encamps, enabling Māgha to air his knowledge of campaigns as they should be conducted in poetry.[2]

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1. JIH. Vol.VIII. pt.III (Madras), 1930, pp.347-8.

2. Keith: HSL, p.126.

An analysis of the poem shows that a considerable part is devoted to this subject alone in the following manner:

(1) The last three cantos (XVIII, XIX, XX) of the poem are entirely devoted to the description of the fight between the two armies.

(2) The marching of the army and the preparations for it form the subject matter in III. 1-32 and XII (except 67-70).

(3) The camping of the army is described in the canto V of the poem.

(4) The preparations of the armies of Śiśupāla and Kṛṣṇa for the battle are described in XV. 71-80 and in XVII. 20-40 respectively.

Army:-

Over and above the traditional four columns of the army, namely, the chariots, elephants, horses and the infantry, Māgha mentions Mantra, the power of counsel (II). It may be noted in this connection that Mantra (power of counsel) and Kośa (power of treasury) were added in the epic period.

It appears that the camels formed a separate corp (XII. 7, 18, 32) of the army in the days of Māgha. They were used by soldiers for riding over long distances (XII. 7, 18, 32) and for carrying burdens (XII. 9). The mules were employed for drawing carts (XII. 19) and light chariots and the oxen as beasts of burden (V. 62, XII. 10) during the campaigns.

Chariots:-

There are not more than one or two stanzas about the fighting of charioteers (XIX. 4.5). It is indeed surprising that this

particular column of the fourfold traditional army had fallen into disuse in the days of Māgha. Shri B.S.Upadhyaya's remark that "the reference to the chariots is only traditional because, they, as a means of warfare, had become extinct long before the time of Kālidāsa" points to the same situation."[1] The other evidences also support our conclusion. The Harsacarita[2] of Bāna (7th Cent. A.D.) does not mention it in the description of Harsa's army. Hiuen Tsang also does not mention chariots when he gives a detailed account of Harsa's army. It is also not found in the army of Pulakesin II (641 A.D.). The Kūram Pallava grant (650 A.D) also does not refer to it.[3]

It may be noted that Māgha refers to it (though in few places) in order to describe a very ancient warfare. Each chariot was marked by its ensign and banner (XVII. 28, III. 23). The position of its flag-staff is a matter of conjecture. Hopkins thinks that a staff was fixed at the back of the chariot rising aloft from the floor. The flags, umbrellas and fans were its paraphernalia (XIII. 21, 22; XX. 4).

Elephants:-

The elephants were the most important column of the army in the days of Māgha as is evidenced from a large number of verses devoted to the account of their fighting (XVIII. 26-51). They were

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1. India in Kalidāsa p.157.
2. Cowell & Thomas - Trns. pp. 224-25.
3. Dikshitar: War in Ancient India, B'bay. 1948, p.166.

equipped with coats of mail and the strong ropes tied to their backs (XVIII. 6). Their eyes were anointed in order to intoxicate them for fight (XVIII. 26). It appears that they were very carefully trained for fighting from the mention of the altar placed between the two elephants when they were taught the art of fighting (XIX. 65). They were adorned with pictures of various weapons on their backs (XVII. 69). They remained so eager for fighting that their eyes had to be covered with clothes which were not removed before their reaching the battle field and the commencement of the fight (XVII. 67; XVIII. 28, 29). The archers sat on their backs and showered arrows on their enemies (XVIII. 9, 39). The hostile soldiers, sometimes, cut off their trunks by means of their swords (XVIII. 45, 47). The elephants crushed soldiers under their feet, tossed them in the air and tore them to pieces with their trunks, tusks and feet (XVIII. 51, 57). The use of the elephants in warfare developed the courage (XVIII. 48), the strength (XVIII. 49) and the skill (XVIII. 47) of the warriors fighting with the elephants. The horsemen also sometimes grappled with elephants (XVIII. 23).

Cavalry:-

The cavalry comes next. In the training and the training of horses the same pitch of excellence had been reached as in the case of elephants. The marks of a good horse, the nature and the ways of treating them are mentioned by Māgha (Vide Chap. XI), thus, showing his proficiency in the subject as treated by writers like Śālihotra.

Māgha informs us that the great attention was paid to the selection of horses and their speed, training (V. 60) and auspicious signs on neck and bosom (V. 4) were taken into consideration at the time of selection. Specific mention is made of the excellent breeds of horses from Arabia (V. 10) and the country called Bālhika (V. 54). Arabia is well known for the excellence of its steeds. According to Rāmāyana[1] and the Mhb. also, the steeds of Bālhika were highly esteemed. The horses were equipped with the saddles, the leather belts tied round them and the golden bells (XVIII. 5). This column of the army was important especially from the point of view of the attack, speed and the breach it caused in the enemy's rank (XVIII. 13). In few cases, they were so well trained in movement and attack that they fearlessly rushed on the elephants and enabled their masters to grapple with terrible creatures (XVIII. 23).

Infantry:-

This column of the army was equally useful in the days of Māgha. But it may be noted that the poet does not speak of the traditional six kinds of foot-soldiers. He refers to this column in general terms only without classifying them as hereditary, mercinary etc. Their equipments were swords (XVIII. 4, 19; XIX. 55) and shields (XVIII. 21), over and above the usual bows and arrows to which numerous references are made. Though references are few, it appears that they used discs (XVIII.45)

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1. Rāma, I. 6. 22. Mhb. Sauptika, 13.2.

and barbed darts (XIX. 59). The strong armours were used as defensive weapons by many (XVII. 21, 51).

It will be interesting to compare the account given of the Gurjara army by Somadevasūri who divides the armies of his time according to the regions in his Yaśastilaka Campū and notes particularly the prominent features of the soldiers of each region. The account about Gurjara soldiers as given by him is as follows. " They wore dhoties hanging down to the knees, had bushy growth of hair all over the body besides hanging locks of hair and moustache. They had quivers of arrows on both shoulders, and daggers at their waist."[1] (p. 467).

Hiuen Tsang, who visited India little before Māgha, describes the infantry of those days and we believe that it remained practically the same in the time of Māgha also. Hence Hiuen Tsang's description of the infantry helps us in forming a picture of the infantry in the days of Māgha. The famous Chinese traveller makes the following observation in this connection:-

" The infantry go lightly into action and are choice men of valour; they bear a large shield and carry a long spear; some are armed with a sword or sabre and dash to the front of the advancing line of battle. They are perfect experts with all the implements of war such as spear, shield, bow, arrow, sword, sabre etc. having been drilled in them for generations."[2]

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1. V.Raghavan 'Gleanings from Somadeva Sūri's Yaśastilaka Campū in JGRI, Vol. I, Pt. 3, May, 1944.

2. Watters: OYC, Vol. I. p.171.

Weapons:-

There are many references to weapons in the Śiśupālavadha, mentioning exhaustively all the varieties and supplying very interesting information.

Śukranīti explains two distinct kinds of weapons which are called astra and sastra. The former , it says, is one which is thrown or cast down by means of charms, machines, or fire, while the latter is any other weapon, for example, sword, dagger etc.[1] The Nītiprakāśikā,[2] on the other hand, divides them into three broad classes, the mukta (thrown), the amukta (not thrown), and the mantramukta (discharged by mantras).

They can also be divided as offensive and defensive. The following offensive weapons are mentioned by the poet; dhanus, bāṇa, asi, asilatā, khadga, kunta, bhalla, śakti, tomara, parigha, prāśa, pāsa, cakra, gadā, hala and musala. Of the defensive ones, we have the mention of kavaca, varman (shield) and godhā.

Let us now examine the nature of these weapons.

(1) Dhanus: is referred to at several places in the poem, XVIII. 9; XIX. 12, 26 and XX. 10. It was made of a long flexible rod the ends of which were joined with a string. Māgha does not give us the measurements of a bow but according to the Nītiprakāśikā, it is four cubits in height, bent at three places and has a tusk-like opening.[3] Māgha refers to the special bows made from the horns of a buffalo (I. 57; XX. 12).

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1. Ch. IV. Sect. VII. 381-82. 2. Nīti, II. 11-13.
3. Nīti., II.17 and IV. 8-9.

(2) Arrows were of various kinds and are mentioned under various names. The references are too numerous to be mentioned here. The arrows were made from iron (XVIII. 22, XX. 13) and had feather-tails (XVIII. 22; XIX. 45) and in some canes, had golden tails (XVIII. 55; XX. 13, 30). Sometimes, they were painted (XX. 24). It appears from one reference (II. 78) that the arrows were poisoned as the poet tells us here in this particular reference that the sharp arrow touches only a point of a body and affects the whole.

(3) Bhalla (XIX. 17) was the spear or javelin-like weapon called bhaṭa in common parlance. It belonged to Amukta class of offensive weapons.

(4) Asi (XVII. 25, 45; XVIII. 4, 17,20; XIX. 28, 30, 48, 50 56) was a long sword. Sometimes, it was provided with ivory hilt (XVII. 25). Māgha mentions sheaths also (XVII. 25).

(5) Asilaṭa (VI. 31) was a small dagger one cubit in length. According to Nītiprakāśikā,[1] it had three edges and was used in close fighting. It had a small and slender handle.

(6) Khadga (XIX. 74) was a short sword used in close fighting.

(7) Kunta (XVIII. 23) was a lance. It was long as is seen from the way in which it is mentioned by Māgha.

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1. Niti., V. 15-17.

(8) Śakti (XIX. 59) was a spear or a javelin. It was made of iron. It has beem described in the Rāmāyana as furnished with eight bells, as giving out a frightful yell, as made full of art and guile by wily Maya, as giving out a frightful yell, and as flying rapidly and leaving behind it a fiery track. It is also mentioned by Kautilya in his Arthaśāstra.[1]

(9) Tomara (XIX. 74; XX. 29), was of two kinds, an iron club and a javelin.[2] It was a club three cubits long and capable of three different movements according to Vaiśampāyana. Agni Purāna says that it was to be with the help of an arrow of straight feathers, and was powerful in dealing blows on the eyes and hands of an enemy. But according to Kautilya's commentator, it was a rod with an arrow-like edge. Māgha does not give any clue to enable us to determine its exact shape. The only thing about its nature that we can make out from the Śiśupālavadha is that it was a weapon belonging to mukta class.

(10) Parigha (XIX. 32) was a heavy wooden beam used for locking or shuting a gate, and was a battering ram.

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1. Bk. II. Ch. 18.
2. V.R.Dikshitar: War in Anct. Ind. p.107.

(11) Prāśa (XVIII. 49) appears to be a kind of lance belonging to the mukta class of weapons from the way in which it is mentioned by Māgha.

(12) Pāsa (I. 56) was a noose killing the enemy at one stroke. It was made of two or three ropes. It is a weapon attributed to the god ~~Yiśu~~ Varuṇa whose Pāsas are wellknown in the Rgveda. It was triangular in shape.

(13) Cakra (XVIII. 45) was a circular disc with a small opening and diagonal bars in the middle and pointed projections on the periphery. The points of these projections were sharp. It is one of the weapons peculiar to Visnu. Māgha describes it as emitting flames of fire when whirled (XX. 78). Kautilya[1] includes it in his list of movable machines.

(14) Gadā is not mentioned by Māgha as a weapon meant for the use by all warriors but is associated with Krsna only (III.18). It was a club made of iron. It has been enumerated by Kautilya[2] as one of the movable machines.

(15) Hala (II. 2) is again, like Gada, not mentioned by Māgha as a common weapon for fighting. It is associated with Balarāma only. It was a very heavy long weapon and must have been used in very early times. It was probably not used in the times of Māgha as he does not mention its use in his descriptions of the fight between the two armies.

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1. Arthaśāstra, Bk. II. Ch. 18.

2. Ibid., Bk. II. Ch. 18.

(16) Musala (II. 70) is again not meant for the common use but is associated with Balarāma as his special weapon. It seems to be out of use in the days of Māgha because of the same reason mentioned above. It was a pestle-like club, both ends well knit together. It was used in ancient times.

Of these offensive weapons, the following belonged to amukta class: dhanus, bhalla, asilatā, asi, khadga, kunta, parigha, prāśa, gadā and hala, while the remaining bāṇa, śakti, tomara, pāśa, cakra and musala belonged to the mukta class of weapons.

Mystical Weapons:-

Māgha mentions the following weapons belonging to this category.

(1) Mohanāstra or Svapnāstra (XX. 32).

(2) Bhujagāstra (XX. 41).

(3) Garudāstra (XX. 52).

(4) Āgneyāstra (XX. 59).

(5) Meghāstra (XX. 65).

Mohanāstra and other mystical weapons mentioned here were 'prayogas' or mystical practice producing the desired effect. The 'prayoga' also means repetition of a certain mantra to endow the arrow with a peculiar virtue which enables it to assume a particular form or to produce a certain effect, while the 'samhāra' means the repetition of the counter mantra which takes away from the arrow the particular virtue it was endowed with and it becomes again an ordinary arrow.

The defensive weapons:-

(1) Kavaca is frequently mentioned (I. 45; II. 29; XV.75; XVII. 21; XIX. 28) by the poet because its use was very common in those days of stern warfare. It may be added in this connection that Māgha does not speak of the varieties of this weapon. He seems to refer to one variety only, namely, the coat of mail to cover the body from head to foot in all these references.

(2) Shield is another defensive weapon mentioned (XVIII. 21) by the poet. He refers to the shield made from leather.

(3) Godhā (XIX. 39) was a small leather belt tied round the palm of the hand to protect the fingers from the scar left by the continuous drawing of a bow-string.

Other equipments of the army:-

We learn from the poem that the army was supplied with other equipments besides weapons. These were banners and ensigns, tents and instruments of music. The banners were so preponderant that the army derived one of its synonyms - patākinī - from them. It seems that different ensigns belonged to different heroes. They were of various patterns like those of the eagle (XV.66 (XVII. 28) and the monkey- kapiketu (XIII. 18).

March of the army:-

Māgha speaks of the dress suitable to travelling (XII.1). The drums were sounded (XVII. 31, 32), conch-shells were blown (XII. 13), banners were waved (XII.44, 49; XVIII. 8) and the alms

were given (XVII. 24) at the time of the march of the army. Wine was drunk before starting and the intoxicants were taken to stimulate courage (XV. 81). During the march, rivers were crossed with the help of elephants (XII. 60, 72) which, by virtue of their extraordinary weight withstood strong current. They were also forded over by boats (XII. 71). Strict discipline was maintained and the villages situated on the way were perfectly safe (XII. 36). The army was free from disease (XIX. 29).

The non-combatants accompanying the army:-

We are told that royal ladies (V. 7, 17, 18, 22; XII. 71), prostitutes (V. 27), merchants (V. 24; XII. 26), carpenters (XII. 25), bards (V. 67; XII. 35), heralds (XI. 1, 10) and Kancukins (V. 18) accompanied the army. The ladies, prostitutes, bards, and heralds provided luxury and comforts to the army while the merchants and carpenters attended to their needs. The bards praised loudly the valorous deeds of soldiers showing prowess (XVIII. 16).

The camping of the army:-

It appears from the account of camping given by Māgha that the camping arrangements were nearly perfect. We are told that the soldiers selected shady (V. 14) and comfortable sites (V. 15) for camping though Māgha does not refer to any strategical consideration in the selection of site. The tents were carried by the army and were used whenever required (XII. 63, 4). The king's tent was erected in such a prominent way that it served to guide

stragglers to their tents (V. 13). The royal tent was conspicuous by a well-displayed flag and it was erected in the centre and was surrounded by those of the vassals (V. 13).

The tents were generally made of cloth (V.24; XII. 63). The royal tents, however, were made of white silk-śuklāmśuka (V. 52) and were high, shady and had festoons (V. 21). They were airy (V. 22).

The merchants accompanying the army pitched their tents and arranged their commodities for sale in an attractive manner (V. 24; XII. 26). They supplied most of the needs of the army. The prostitutes were not far behind in setting up their tents and using the wellknown wiles in attracting the passers-by (V. 27). Some of them went to the royal tents at the sun-set and came out at the sun-rise (XI. 20). The royal ladies were comfortable in their tents and put up/with their husbands (V. 22; XII. 34). In this regard, Māgha is supported by Kautilya[1] who observes that the women with prepared food and beverage should stand behind uttering encouraging words to the fighting heroes.

The guards were posted to watch the movements of the enemy and to look after the general safety of the army particularly during the hours of night (XI. 4).

Māgha mentions music in the camp. There is a distination between the music on the battlefield and music in the camp.

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1. Arthaśāstra. Bk. X. Ch. 3.

We learn that the ~~k~~ melodies in the camp are softened (XI. 1), the drums were beaten indicating end of night (XI. 2) and the warriors were treated with the sweet notes of the lyre (XI. 10). Thus the camp was generally a self-sufficient unit. It was a town in miniature.

War Music:-

Music was a special feature ~~k~~ of the Indian warfare. As noticed above, the notes of music were different in the camp and in the battlefield. The musical instruments for war are mentioned from Ṛgveda onwards. There were musical instruments which were meant for use only on sacrificial and festive occasions. There were others like dundubhi which were used in both war and peace.

Māgha mentions the following musical instruments which provided music in the camp. They are Mrdanga (XI. 2) and Vīṇā (XI. 10). He, again, mentions others which were used at the commencement of the marching of the army and during the battle to encourage the fighting warriors. They are Ānaka (XVII. 20, 31, 42; XVIII. 78), Bheri (XII. 27; XIX. 66), Ḍiṇḍima (XVIII. 10), Dundubhi (XVII. 32; XVIII. 3), Kāhala (XVIII. 54), Mṛdanga (XVII. 42), Paṇava (XIII. 5), Paṭaha (III. 24; XVII. 43) and Turī (XVII. 34, 38; XVIII. 54; XIX. 26).

Battle:-

Battles were generally fought is special martial arrays, called Vyūhas, of various kinds (XIX. 41; XVI. 67). A Vyūha was

a strategical position in which an army was drawn up after ascertaining from the due consideration of circumstances the most advantageous position. When the actual battle began and the four columns of the army faced their counterparts of the hostile army, the infantry fell on foot-soldiers, the warriors in the chariot on one fighting from the chariot, the cavalry on the cavalry and the elephant rider on one on the elephant (XVIII. 2). The various tactis were employed to get an advantage over the enemy (XIX. 15; XX. 32). The leaders set inspiring examples by displaying courage and daring (XIX. 32). Special and mystical weapons were employed by the most outstanding leaders in their duels (XX. 32, 37, 41, 52, 59, 65).

One kind of land fight was siege warfare. The capital city of hostile king was besieged and supplies and re-inforcements were cutt off (II. 64).

Customs and Conventions:-

The poet refers to Nirājana, the ceremony of circular waving of lights (XVII. 16). This was performed on the eve of military expedition with the object of purification of infantry, elephants and horses that constituted the columns of the army. There was a military custom of performing the auspicious rites on the eve of marching of the army for a battle. This consisted of dancing, singing, playing on musical instruments and sprinkling water to settle dust by women-folk (XVII. 37-39). The warriors announced their names before exchanging blows and counter-blows, but if they failed to do so, this was done by the bards

going with them to the field of battle (XVIII. 16). The poet suggests the contemporary custom of giving alms by the rich before the commencement of a battle (XIX, 46).

There was also a convention that the kings, before setting out for a battle, partook wine in company of their wives (XV. 80). The hostile kings came together and drank wine together after the cessation of hostilities and declaration of peace on agreeable terms (XVI. 12). The military code enjoined that once challenged, a kṣatriya must respond. The reference to this custom of issuing challenges is found in XX. 1. A king should never turn his back from a battlefield even if his life is in danger (XIV. 44). No warrior considered it honourable for himself to take to his heels from fighting (XIX. 56).

Beliefs:-

Māgha, while describing a battle between two armies, incidentally refers to certain beliefs associated with war. Those warriors who are killed fighting odds face to face attain to heaven (XIX. 31, 73) and marry celestial nymphs (XVII. 34). The poet suggests in XIX. 38 the belief that a foot-soldier, who, retreating from fighting due to fear, and killed by his enemy, obtains the fruit of bad deeds of his master, who, in turn, gets the fruit of good deeds of that foot-soldier (XIX. 38). A belief was entertained in those days that a human trunk begins to dance when one thousand warriors are killed (XIX. 51).

Psychology of War:-

We find in the poem that it was Śiśupāla's spirit of jealousy that led to war. He was jealous of the honour done to Kṛsna by Yudhiṣṭhira and it is also possible that he might not have liked Yudhiṣṭhira's performance of Rājasūya sacrifice at the end of attaining world-mastery.

Ethics of War:-

Hindu military science recognises two kinds of warfare - the dharmayuddha and the kūṭayuddha. There is also another classification viz. open warfare and secret warfare. Dharmayuddha is war conducted on the principles of Dharma, i.e. the rules of fair fight should be observed by warriors. It was a just and righteous war which had the approval of society. It was also called open warfare as there was to be no secrecy about it. On the other hand, kūṭayuddha was crafty fight carried on in secret and was unrighteous.

Māgha describes Dharmayuddha or fair fight in the poem and bases it on ethical principles and valour. Māgha appears to think that the waging of war without regard to moral standards degraded the institution into mere animal ferocity. Accordingly, we have references to certain rules of conduct followed by warriors while fighting. First of all, a flying enemy should not be pursued (XVIII. 18). The panic-stricken enemy should not be killed (XIX. 18). Wounded warriors should be protected even if they belonged to the hostile camp (XVIII. 66). Kings even if

their life was in danger did not discard the principles of fair fighting which formed a chivalrous code of military honour (XIX. 60).

The following remarks of Stopford A. Brooke[1] will be found interesting:-

" To fight to the death for these great possessions (defence of family's honour and of country's warfare), to feel that it is honour to die for them and dishonour to retreat from them, to give up everything material for them, to war for them to the last man, is just, true and righteous war, and there is not a thought or a passion connected with it which does not exalt and ennoble, not only the persons and the nation which wage it but the whole body also of humanity to whom the great tradition of this defence is handed down, and whom the memory of it inspires, teaches and ennobles."

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1. A Discourse on War, (The Hibbert Jl; 1915-16, p. 674).