

MILITARY MUSIC USED IN VEDIC WARFARE

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The Vedic literature is the earliest extent record of the Āryan and it reflects a stage of cultural, social, political evolution in India. It sheds a good deal of light on the system of government in that period. The king was the head of both the civil and military administration. The Vedic Āryans fought with the Dāsas for their settlement, cattle, land, etc.. They developed a very high code of warfare. The army of one of the king went to the territory of the enemy king. In the Vedic period, there are four types of armies, viz. charioteers, cavalry, infantry and elephantry. They used various types of weapons like bow, arrows, lance, spears, thunderbolt, etc.. They covered their body with coat of mail called *varman*, they used helmet to cover and protect their heads and handguard to protect their hands from the friction of bow-string in the warfare. Besides these, the warrior used various arts, principles and ethics in their warfare for winning a war.

The Vedic works contains in itself the knowledge of various arts. Among the various arts music, dance, playing on various musical instruments occupied an important place in the life of the Vedic Āryans. Music was considered as a great importance. The history of military music in India goes back to the early Vedic period. Warfare music was one of the important features of the Vedic warfare. At that period, singing was given the prominent place. The *R̥gvedasamhitā* contains the Dānastutis, which were sung in praise of kings and nobles.¹ These were probably like ballads. It also contains a long battle song, which is sung in praise of the brave deeds of a hero.² They were proficient with vocal and instrumental music. There are three types of instruments, viz. percussion, wind and string. Among these, percussion instrument like drum or *dundubhi*, wind instrument like flute made of bamboo and stringed instrument like *vīṇā* or lute. Such instruments were used both in peace and war. The Vedic Āryans and the Dāsas were proficient in the art of war. They used various musical instruments in their war. Besides the fighters, there were also musicians, drummers, dancers, the camp followers etc. in every troops of the Vedic warfare. They encouraged the soldiers by rousing their military mettle playing on warlike tune. Various musical instruments like *dundubhi*, *bakura*, *karkari* etc., which were used to encourage the soldiers. The loud, deep

and sonorous sound of these instruments spread to a long distance and heartened the fighters. It was also used as battle signal, calling upon all fighters to assemble.³ Sāyaṇācārya in his

commentary says- *dudubhiḥ ketumat prjñānavat yathā sarvaijñāyate tathā vāvadīti bhr̥śam śabdam karoti/ aśvaparnāḥ aśvapatanā aśvavāhāśca naḥ asmadīyāśca naraḥ puruṣāḥ sam caranti śatrubhīryuddhamānā vartante* //⁴

The instruments used in producing battle-music were many and varied, viz. drum, tambourine, trumpet, conch-shell, horn etc.. Some instruments are found to be used at the time of sacrificial and festive occasions and others are both in war and peace. War music was played when the army marched; it heralded the beginning of the battle. There are musicians and drummers in every army squadron to encourage the soldiers by rousing their military mettle playing on warlike tune and thus spur them on to action. The *Ṛgvedasamhitā* contains a hymn in praise of the war-drum.⁵ The *Atharvavedasamhitā* ⁶ also contains hymns in praise of the battle-drum, wherein it is described as loud-noised, thundering like a lion, exciting the weapons of the warriors and overpowering hostile plotters. The drum was called *dundubhi*, which is an onomatopoeic word, so called on account of the sound it emitted when struck. The word *dundubhi* is frequently mentioned in the Vedic literature.⁷ It was a kettledrum and an earth-drum. The war-drum is used to become the warrior more stronger.⁸ Their sound enables the warriors to defeat the scattered sections of the enemy. It is thus capable of beating off the enemy.⁹ The loud noise of the drum, which act like a warrior, whetting the voice, dominates the enemies. The drum thunder loudly against the enemies like a lion, about to conquer.¹⁰ The drum, with the divine voice, bring the warrior with strength t.¹¹ In the *Ṛgvedasamhitā*, the *dundubhi* is praised to drive out the foemen to the remotest distance associated with the Gods and Indra.¹² Sāyaṇācārya in his commentary says-*he dundubhe saḥ tvam indreṇa anyaiḥ devaiḥ ca sajuḥ saha dūrāddavīyaḥ dūrādapi dūratarām śatrūn asmadīyān apa sedha apagamaya* //¹³ In this regard Yāska states- *dundubhiriti śabdānukaraṇam drumo bhinna iti vā dundubhyatervā syādvadhakarmanāḥ* //¹⁴ The drum was made of wood (*vānaspatya*)¹⁵ and covered with the skin of an antelope ¹⁶ but usually with the skin of cow.¹⁷ The *Purohita* of the king sounds them thrice and hands them over to the warriors as they go forth to battle. All musical instruments are washed, dipped into a mixture which contains the fragrant substances of Tagara and Usīra¹⁸; they are next anointed with the dregs of ghee. The drum was the shouting herald followed by the army.¹⁹ The army marched through forests and villages infusing terror in the hearts of the enemy and the females of enemy by the noise of the fearful drum.²⁰ The sound of the string of the bows and

of the drum defeat the enemy.²¹ The drum works wonders, because it is sharpened the Brāhmaṇ of the Purohita.²² In a Ṛgvedic verse, Ulūlekhaka was praised to make the clearest and loud sound, as the drum of conquerors.²³ Sāyaṇācārya in his commentary says- *jayatāmiva dundubhiḥ/ yathā yuddhe jayaṁ prāpnuvatām rājñām dundubhiḥ mahāntam dhvaniṁ karoti tadvat/*²⁴ The Vedic literature mentions another drum also, called *bhūmi dundubhi* which was used at the time of wars.²⁵ *Gargara* is another type of instrument which produces sound like that of a *gargara* and used in the war. Sāyaṇācārya in his commentary says- *gargaraḥ gargaradhvaniyukto vādyaviśeṣo yuddhe ava svarāti bhayaṁ śabdayati*²⁶ According to Wilson, it means a drum.²⁷ In the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* also states that to encourage crowds in battle made some noises as these be made *kṣvedāḥ kilakilā* and *krakaca*, with horns and drums.²⁸ In the *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya mentions *tūrya karas* (trumpet blowers) and assigns them double the wages of ordinary musicians.²⁹ However, the sound of the trumpet (*tūrya ghoṣa*) is mentioned as one of the means to signalise nāyaka's orders to his troops.³⁰ The kettle-drums were beaten between the night watches in a fort or camp and that a surprise attack was often announced by the blare of trumpets and drums.

Bamkura or *bakura* was another musical instrument which was used in times of war. *Bakura* is mentioned in one passage of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā*, where it is said that the Aśvins made light for the Āryan by blowing their *bakura* against the Dasyus.³¹ Actually the word *bakura* means the thunderbolt. Sāyaṇācārya in his commentary explains the word *bakura* as- *bakuro bhāsamāno vajraḥ*³² According to Yāska, it means one who gives light, or who inspires awe, or who runs effulgent. He explains the word *bakura* as- *bakuro bhāskaro bhayaṁkaro bhāsamāno dravatīti vā*³³ In another verse of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā*, *bākuraṁ* is used as an epithet of *dr̥ta*, the combined words denoting a wind instrument of some kind.³⁴

Karkari was another musical instrument used in Vedic warfare. It was probably the name of a wind instrument of music which emitted a shrill, sharp and loud sound like that of a clarion. This musical instrument was mentioned in the Vedic Samhitās.³⁵ According to Macdonell and Keith, it was probably the name of a lute.³⁶ The *Maitrāyaṇīsamhitā* mentions that cattle branded on the ears with a mark resembling a lute- *karkari karṇyah*³⁷

Besides the musicians, there were also dancers in every troop in the Vedic period. The art of dancing was developed as the pastime of both men and women. The dancers danced in their wild excitement, keeping time with the loud and sonorous sound of the war-drums, before the battle took place. In the *Ṛgvedasamhitā*, there is clear mention of Indra dancing

in the battlefield ³⁸, and of men dancing with bamboo-sticks.³⁹ The passage *vaṁśamiva yemire* is mentioned in a Ṛgvedic verse, which according to Wilson, means they have raised like a bamboo. The Scholiast says, they have elevated Indra, as tumblers raise a bamboo pole, on the summit of which they balance themselves, a not uncommon feat in India; or as *vaṁśa* means also a family, it may be rendered, as ambitious persons raise their family to consequence.⁴⁰ Sāyaṇācārya interprets this passage as follows-*vaṁśamiva/ yathā vaṁśāgre nṛtyantaḥ śilpinaḥ prauḍhaṁ vaṁśamunnataṁ kurvanti/ yathā vā sanmārgavartinaḥ svakīyaṁ kulamunnataṁ kurvanti tadvat/*⁴¹ Yāska states this verse as- *gāyanti tvā gāyatriṇaḥ prārcanti te'rkamarkīṇo brāhmaṇāstvā śatakrata udyamire vaṁśamiva. vaṁśo vanaśayo bhavati vananācchūyata iti vā*⁴² The dancer danced the weird war-dance to encourage the warriors to fight bravely in the battlefield. They danced not only to excite and encourage themselves and their comrades to fight bravely, but also to terrify the enemy with loud yells.

Thus, it can be said that various usages were used in warfare during the Vedic period. Among these usages, military music was considered as a great importance. The instruments used in war were many and varied. Among these, drum, tambourine, trumpet, conch-shell, horn, etc. were prominently used in the battlefield. People set their heart and mind on music which was a very important source of recreation. The Vedic people like to dance also. Music was used to encourage the soldiers in the battlefield. In epic period also military music was used in the battlefield. Therefore, the musicians with their musical instruments accompanied to the army to the battlefield like the modern military band

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¹ *R̥gveda.*, 10.107

² *Ibid.*, 6.75

³ *āmūraja pratyāvartayemāḥ ketumaddundubhirvāvadīti /*

samaśvparṇāścaranti no naro 'smākamindra rathino jayantu // Ibid., 6.47.31

⁴ *Sāyaṇa.*, *Ibid*

⁵ *upa śvāsaya pṛthivīmuta dyām purutrā te manutām viṣṭhitam jagat /*

sa dundubhe sajūrindreṇa devairdūrāddavīyo apa sedha śatrūn //

ā krandaya balamojo na ā dhā niḥ ṣṭanihi duritā bādhamānaḥ/

apa protha dundubhe ducchunā ita indrasya muṣṭirasi vīḍayasva //

āmūraja pratyāvartayemāḥ ketumaddundubhirvāvadīti /

samaśvaparnāścaranti no naro 'smākamindra rathino jayantu // Ibid., 6.47.29-31

⁶ *Atharvaveda.*, 5.20, 5.21

⁷ *R̥gveda.*, 1.28.5, 6.47.29-31

Also vide, *Atharvaveda.*, 5.20.1

Vājasaneyisaṁhitā., 16.35, 29.55-57

Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa., 1.3.6.2

Śatapathabrāhmaṇa., 5.1.5.6

⁸ *rājanye dundubhāvāyatāyāmaśvasya vāje puruṣasya māyau/*

indram yā devī subhagā jajāna sā na aitu varcasā saṁvidānā// Atharvaveda., 6.38.4

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.126.1-4

¹⁰ *uccairghoṣo dundubhiḥ satvanāyan vānaspatyaḥ sambhr̥ta ustriyābhiḥ /*

vācam kṣuṇuvāno damayantsapatnānsimha iva jeṣyannabhi taṁstanīhi // Ibid., 5.20.1

¹¹ *saṁjayan pṛtanā ūrdhvamāyurgṛhyā grhṇāno bahudhā vi cakṣva/*

daivīm vācam dundubha ā gurasva vedhāḥ śatrūṇāmupa bharasva vedaḥ //Ibid. 5.20.4

¹² *Rgveda.*, 6.47.29

¹³ *Sāyaṇa* , *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Nirukta.* 9.12

¹⁵ *uccairghoṣo dundubhiḥ satvanāyan vānaspatyaḥ sambhṛta ustriyābhiḥ / Atharvaveda.*, 5.20.1

¹⁶ *parāmitrān dundubhinā hariṇasyājīnena ca // Ibid.*, 5.21.7

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.20.1, 5.21.3

¹⁸ *Kauśikasūtra.*, 16.1

¹⁹ *saṁkrandanah pravado dhṛṣṇuṣeṇah pravedakṛd bahudhā grāmaghoṣī /*

śreyo vanvāno vayunāni vidvān kīrtim bahubhyo vi hara dvirāje //Atharvaveda., 5.20.9

²⁰ *dundubhervācam prayatām vadantīmāśṛṇvatī nāthitā ghoṣavuddhā /*

nārī putram dhāvatu hastagrhyāmitrī bhītā samare vadhānām// Ibid., 5.20.5

²¹ *jyāghoṣā dundubhayobhi krośantu yā diśaḥ /*

senāḥ parājītā yatīramitrāṇāmanīkaśaḥ // Ibid., 5.21.9

²² *Ibid.*, 5.20.10

²³ *yacciddhi tvaṁ grhegrha ulūkhalaka yuyjase /*

iha dyumattamaṁ vada jayatāmiva dundubhiḥ // Rgveda., 1.28.5

²⁴ *Sāyaṇa*, *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Taittirīyasamhitā.*, 7.5.9.3

Also vide, *Aitareyāranyaka.*, 5.1.5

²⁶ *Sāyaṇa*, *Rgveda.*, 8.69.9

²⁷ Vide, H.H.Wilson, *Rgvedasamhitā*. Vol.5, Nag Publisher, Delhi,1977 p.276

²⁸ *Mahābhārata*, 12.100.46

²⁹ *Arathaśāstra*, 5.3

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.6

³¹ *yavaṃ vṛkeṇāśvinā vapanteṣaṃ duhantā manuṣāya dasrā/*

abhi dasyuṃ vakureṇā dhamantoru jyotiścakrathurāryāya// Ṛgveda., 1.117.21

³² *Sāyaṇa*, *Ibid.*

³³ *Nirukta.*, 6.25

³⁴ *tamīm hinvantyagruvo dhamanti bākuraṃ dṛtim/*

tridhātu vāraṇaṃ madhu // Ṛgveda., 9.1.8

³⁵ *yadutpatanvadasi karkariryathā bṛhadvadema vidathe suvīrāḥ // Ibid.*, 2.43.3

Also vide, *Atharvaveda.*, 4.37.5

³⁶ Vide A.A. Macdonell, & A.B.Keith, , *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, vol 1.Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi,1982 p. 139

³⁷ *Maitrāyaṇīsamhitā* ., 4.2.9

³⁸ *bhinatpuro navatimindra pūrave divodāsāya mahi dāśuṣe nṛto vajreṇa dāśuṣe nṛto // Ṛgveda.*, 1.130.7

³⁹ *gāyanti tvā gāyātriṇo 'rcantyarkamarkīṇaḥ/*

brahmāṇastvā śatakrata udvaṃśamiva yemire//Ibid., 1.10.1

⁴⁰ Vide, H.H. Wilson. *Op.cit* , vol.1 p.219

⁴¹ *Sāyaṇa* , *Ṛgveda.*,1.10.1

⁴² *Nirukta*, 5.5

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