CHAPTER VI

NAVY
The navy and the naval-warfare have a history dating back to the Vedic Age. The Hindus had acquired a great mastery over the nautical skill. The Indian coast line was studded with a long string of ports like Patala, Susparika, Bṛigukaccha, Kāviri-Paṭṭanam and Tāmrālipti. ¹ It is gathered from a Jātaka legend that a wood worker’s guild instead of delivering a ship to the state for which they had been paid in advance, stealthily sailed away with it down the course of the Ganges to a far off island. ² Some Hindu merchants were seen having settled in Socotra island in the Arabian sea by the author of the Periplus of Erythraen Sea. A few Indian marine traders had been washed away to Germany by a storm. ³

The Greek author of the ‘Periplus of the Erythraen Sea’, which undertook a voyage to India in the first century A.D. along the coasts of the Red-Sea and the Arabian Sea has furnished us with very minute details of his experiences. He informs us that there was active trade between India and the Western countries through her important harbours such as Barbarika, Barygaza, Muziris, Nelcynda, Bakari, Korkai and Puhur. The Indian ships sailed from her ports loaded with such attractive merchandise as pearls, precious stones, spices, unguents and

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¹ *Rg-Veda* I, 48, 3 and 1, 116, 5; *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VI, 1930, p. 645
² *Samudra Vānija Jātaka* (iv, 159); *I.H.Q.* Vol. VI, p. 465
³ *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VI, p. 646
muslims. This account was corroborated later by Pliny and the finds of Greek and Roman coins in India. With a long coastline, plenty of timber and wide varieties of home produce to attract foreign buyers, it was but natural for Indian people to become sea-faring nation.

The Mauryas had a well-managed Navy and Naval Department of five members. Kauṭilya catered for the appointment of the Superintendent of Ships with civil as well as military duties. Whereas he regulated collection of toll from foreign as well as native ships which are in transit and punishment of those who crossed or forded the river at a place not fixed for the purpose, and the launching of large boats with a captain, a steersman and other servants; it also made him (the Superintendent) responsible for the destruction of "pirate ships, vessels which are bound for the country of an enemy, as well as those which have violated the customs and rules in force in port towns."

There was a strict superintendence over the movements of foreign merchants. Only those were allowed to land in ports who were well known to the local merchant and who were frequent visitors to the country. That speaks for regular Indian intercourse with other maritime nations, and the possession of navy worth some reckoning. The naval traditions of the Great Mauryas

4. Majumdar, R.C., An Advanced History of India, Ch. XV, pp. 211-12
5. Ray Chaudhuri, H.C., An Advanced History of India, p. 128
6. Arthasastra, Bk. II. Ch. XXVIII
7. Ibid.
were kept up by those kings who rose on the graves of the Colossus like Chandragupta and his illustrious grandson Ashoka. The spirit of the maritime adventure found its free vent in the Far-East and the South-East Asia. Great kingdoms came to be established by the Indians between the second and the fifth century A.D. in Cambodia, Javâ, Sumâtrâ, Borneo, Bâlî, Malay Peninsula and Annâm. Some of these lasted for well over a thousand years. 8 The Guptas also seem to have won some naval laurels as is indicated by Harisena in his Prayâg Prasâsti of Samudragupta, 9 whose suzerainty might have been accepted by the people of Simhala along with other islanders. Although it may be only an allusion to the embassy sent by Meghavarna, the king of Ceylon, yet it may allude to the possession of a naval force by the Great Guptâ, which to our mind is doubtful in the absence of any direct evidence.

Jivita Guptâ II is represented to have an invincible camp made so by the possession of ships besides cavalry, infantry and elephantry. Harsâ's victorious camp consisted of "ships, elephants and horses". 10

Purika was sacked by Pulkesin II with a naval fleet consisting of 100 fighting vessels. His grandson Vinâyâditya sailed out to Ceylon and reduced her king to submission. 11

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10. *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VI, 1930, p. 651
In the early mediaeval literature and inscriptions details are found regarding long journeys on ships to countries of the Far East and Western Asia.\(^\text{12}\)

We have no information as to how the Indians constructed their galleys equipped and manned them.\(^\text{13}\) However, the Yuktikalpātaru of Bhoja Parmāra (1010-1054 A.D.) mentions that a category of boats called agramandirā having their cabins towards their prows was extremely suitable for naval warfare.\(^\text{14}\) It goes to show not any major progress and development in the art of Naval-Warfare, but merely the continuance of some interest in this arm of the military service of the country.

It may be mentioned at this point that geography did play its usual role in determining the areas of naval development, and consequently the maritime skill flourished amongst the people of South, East and West. Since South falls beyond our area of study, we shall cover here what is known to us about Bengal and Assam in the East and Indus Valley and its delta and Saurāshṭra Coast in the West.

With Eastern shore washed by the sea and its plains watered by the Great Ganges, the Brahmputra and their off-shoots, Bengal was ideally fitted for the naval development. Her people had become famous for their nautical skill right in the days of Kālidāsa who characterised the Bengalees as naval experts.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{12}\) Bajpai, K.D., Prāchīn Bhārat Ka Videshan Se Sambandh (Hindi) pp. 123-146

\(^{13}\) Chakravarty, P.C., The Art of War in Ancient India, p. 66

\(^{14}\) Yuktikalpātaru, p. 228 quoted I.H.Q., Vol. VI, p. 647

\(^{15}\) Raghuvaṃsa, IV, 36
Harbours and dockyards were well known in the sixth century A.D. Though its exact location is not known but a ship building harbour or Navala-Kšeni was in existence in 531 A.D.\(^\text{16}\) The palas exploited the naval aptitude of the people fully to raise a combatant fleet which while sailing in the Bhagirathi appeared as if a string of mountains had been sunk to make for Rama another water crossing.\(^\text{17}\) Towards the end of 11th century even when the pala empire was at its lowest ebb, it was with the help of a strong navy that Kumārapala’s minister Vaidyadeva could restore law and order in the country. For this, he had to fight a naval action against Kalinga’s ruler Anantavarman somewhere near the mouths of the Ganges.\(^\text{18}\) The political successors of the palas-Chandras, Varmans and the Senas, acquired their territories as well as naval traditions. They only substituted Nau-Vānaprtaka or Nau-Balavānaprtaka for the erstwhile Naukādhyakṣa, but continued to perpetuate the efficiency of the Naval force. King Vijayasena is credited with despatching a victorious expedition along the river Ganges.\(^\text{19}\) Not only Bengal rose to have a naval flotille in the East but Assam too seem to have contributed in the development of the nautical skill. Bhāskaravarman of Kamrūpa possessed “splendid ships”\(^\text{20}\). It was reported by Yuan Chwang that Bhāskaravarman with his 30,000 ships followed Hārsha’s triumphant march from Rājmahal (Kie-shu-ho-ki-lo) to Kanauj.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{16}\) Dharmāditya’s Copper Plate Grant: Indian Antiquary, Vol. XIX, p. 98
\(^\text{18}\) Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI, p. 653
\(^\text{19}\) Epigraphia Indica, Vol. I, p. 305 ff
\(^\text{20}\) Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 76
\(^\text{21}\) Beal, Life of Hsien Tsang, p. 172
Bengal and Assam's reputation seem to have continued even in the mediaeval period. Husain Shah (1498-1520 A.D.) of Bengal is reported to have attacked Assam at the head of his naval fleet. Padishah-nâmah eulogises the pluck of Assamese seamen of 17th century.

In the beginning of our period, we find that naval potentialities of the people of the Western region had found expression in the piratical raids on the waves of the high seas. Arabian sea or more particularly Persian-gulf was their arena of brigandage. Persia was the worst sufferer at the destructive raids of these sea-wolves who first ransacked and later reduced to ashes the objects of their greed. As a defensive and obstruc-tive measure against the keels of sea-robbers the Tigris was blocked with huge boulders and massive stones, for which clearance operations were ordered by Alexander on his return journey from India. It was the alleged act of sea brigandage by the medes of Debul, on a ship carrying women from Ceylon, which had led to the Arab attacks and subsequent capture of Sind.

It may also be recalled here that the flotilla consisting of thirty oared galleys which carried part of Alexanders' soldiers under command Nearchus was built and furnished by the people of Indus delta, i.e. xathori (ksatri) an autonomous tribe.

22. Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872, Pt. I, No. 1
23. Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI, p. 930, p. 655
24. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. I, p. 552; Strabo, Geography, XVI 1; Arrian, VII, 7
25. Baladhuri, Futuh al Buldan (Tr by Clark Murgotten), pp. 215-26
26. Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI, p. 656
Alberuni also recorded their notoriety for robberies on the sea in their ships termed as bira. So much so that the petty chiefs of the mediaeval period have been accused of organizing pirate fleets.

Even the blue waters of Indus were muddied by at least two deadly clash of arms. The first naval action was fought between Hullishah and Junaid, in which the former was taken captive when his ship lost her way. In about 725 A.D. (107 A.H.) Joneid, the governor of Sind made numerous successful depredatory raids in the East but he, "injured the Muslim name by warring against Jeihaba, an Indian prince, who, not withstanding his profession of the faith, was made prisoner in a sea-fight and put to death. His brother set out for Kufa to lodge complaint against this unjust attack, when he too was caught on the way in the tyrant's toils and put to death...."

Therefore, according to Sir William Muir this action was fought on the sea and not in the river Sind. About the second action this is what Nizamu-d-din Ahmed, the author of the Tabakat-i-Akbari, has to say: "In the same year (417 H.), the Sultan, with a view to punish the Jats, who had molested his army on his return from Multan and when he arrived there, he ordered fourteen hundred boats to be built, each of which was armed with

three firm iron spikes, projecting one from the prow and two from the sides, so that anything which came in contact with them would infallibly be destroyed. In each boat were twenty archers, with bows and arrows, grenades, and naptha; and in this way they proceeded to attack the Jâts, who having intelligence of the armament, sent their families into the islands and prepared themselves for the conflict. They launched, according to some four and according to others, eight thousand boats, manned and armed, ready to engage the Muhammadans. Both fleets met, and desperate conflict ensued. Every boat of the Jâts that approached the Moslem fleet, when it received the shock of the projecting spikes, was broken and overturned. Thus, most of the Jâts were drowned, and those who were not so destroyed, were put to the sword. The veracity of this whole account is very doubtful.

It is improbable that Mahmûd could marshal such a huge fleet in a very short period. The total number of ships which took part on both sides could not have been collected throughout the whole of Punjâb. Fighting all his life on the land, it is a baffling historical jargon, as to how overnight, Mahmûd switched over to the naval fighting and that too of his own accord and not being forced by circumstances. Could he risk his name and reputation in a serious adventure like this without providing necessary training to his troops, and

31. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. II, pp. 477-78
how is it that he did not think of using the Indus on his historic march to and return from Somat, when he was so capable to do so just after a few months of this said campaign. He was shrewd and veteran enough to save his troops from incalculable miseries of the long march through the great Indian deserts and he would have gladly avoided implementing a complex administrative plan requiring thousands of camels to carry water and fodder alone and risking fight against the ferocious Rājputas, were he competent enough to gather and employ a naval flotilla. More so, the bed of Indus is not a high sea to permit deployment for war of six or ten thousand galleys or even keels. Whereas, with all his genius and the commanding might, the 'conqueror of the world' that Alexander the great, could gather a naval squadron, just adequate to transport only a part of his force under Nearchus in the same waters, and Mahmūd having never even seen a naval fight before, commands a huge force in a successful water combat. It is simply unbelievable. All that could have happened, is the crossing operation against the Jāts who opposed this action by employing boats much larger in number than their mighty opponents.

It may be stated here that although Bengal and the Indus, did contribute to the development of the country's nautical skill, it was primarily in the down South that country's naval power touched its apex. Long before the

32. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. II, Foot note, p. 477
Christ, they had extensive commercial relations with Egypt, other West Asian countries, Greece and Rome. It were the Ceras who had laid the foundations of Naval supremacy in the South, but the honour of taking it to the dizzy heights of prosperity went to the cholas. It were they who carried their arms right up to Borneo. They conquered a large many areas of the Far-East and the "Bay of Bengal was converted into a cola lake".

It would, thus appear that navy as an arm of military service, although insignificant and neverin the lime light excepting perhaps in Eastern, Southern and Western India, was not altogether unknown in the Hindustan proper. It may be pointed out that navy was generally employed for commerce and transportation of military supplies. No wonder then, the records of the period after the great Kautilya do not speak much about the administration and functioning of the Navy.

33. Cambridge History of India, Vol. I., p. 594
34. Kanakasabhai, The Tamils 1800 years ago, p. 65; Chakravarty, p. 64
35. Bajpai, K.D., Prachin Bharat Ka Videshon Se Sambandh (Hindi), pp. 169-70