CHAPTER VIII

INTELLIGENCE AND SECRET SERVICES
"A good military leader must dominate the events which encompass him; once events get the better of him he will lose the confidence of his men, and when that happens he ceases to be of value as a leader. He has therefore got to anticipate enemy reactions to his own moves, and to take quick steps to prevent interference with his own plans."\(^1\)

It is too tedious a job to know the intentions of the enemy because "You will usually find that the enemy has three courses open to him; of these, he will adopt the fourth."\(^2\) Therefore, a first rate intelligence service is a major requirement of an operational plan.

The spies have always filled a very important place in the king's council right from the days of the Rgveda. Indra sent Sarmā, the bitch of Gods, to trace out the treasure of Paṇīs. Agni was assigned the role of āuta and directed to bring the Gods to the sacrificial post.

In the Atharvaveda Varuṇa's spies have been depicted to search the whole earth with thousand eyes. "The spies have been attributed to Mitra (VIII. 61,3) to Agni (VI. 4,3) to Soma"

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4. *Ibid.*, VIII 44.3
5. *Ibid.*, VI 16.4
(IX. 43,4,7) to demons combated by Indra (X. 10,8)."6

The spies came to be equated with the eyes of the king, in the epic and post-epic period.7 The importance of the institution of spies was in no way under rated even for war purposes. During the epic war of the Mahābhārata, they were sent across the lines frequently and kept their employers well informed about the war designs of their rivals.

Kauṭilya has laid down a complete net-work of spies throughout the length and breadth of the country. Firstly, there was an organisation (samastah) consisting of five categories or institutes which were responsible to inform the king about the character of the king's employees. The first category was of fraudulent disciples who were competent of knowing and predicting the minds of others. One who was initiated into asceticism and was of good moral character and had foresight, was termed as a recluse (Udāsthita) spy. He was allotted land and money and had large number of ascetics in his employ. He provided them with their daily needs and despatched them on secret missions. The third constituent of the 'Samastah' was a grihapatiaka or house-holder spy. He was to be an honest cultivator in bad days, was allotted land to till and supported number of spies like the recluse. To qualify

7. *Manu IX. 256; Kamandakya XII. 28,30; Nitiya, p. 53; Agni Purāṇa, p. 220,20; Udyogarva (33,34); Santiparva 69,8-12; 66, 20-21; 93,10; Chakravarty, pp. 67-68
8. *The Mahābhārata, Udyogarva* 196,2; *Dronarvarṇa* 73,77; 74,1
for the post of merchant-spy (Vaidehaka), he had to be trader with a foresight but become poor in his profession. He was to produce merchandise in the land allotted to him and look after the needs of a few spies. He who was with a shaven head (munda) or braided hair (jatila), and wanted to be profitably employed, could do so in the guise of an ascetic practising austerities. Merchant-spies were to become his disciples and pronounce him to be a man possessed of supernatural powers.

To the second class of spies belonged those spies who were of high family, were linguists, expert in doing make-up, reliable and "shall be sent by the king to spy in his own country the movements of his own ministers, priests, commanders of the army, the hair-apparent.".... and hosts of top state employees. In this category fell the classmate-spies (Satru) who, as orphans had been brought up by the state and educated in science, palmistry, sorcery, duties of different religious orders, reading of omens etc; fiery spies or tikalpa, who were reckless desperados; poisoner spies or rasada who were cruel, devoid of all love and affection; and mendicant woman spies or bhikshuki.

The intelligence gained by all these spies was passed on to the organisation of espionage (Samsthavarpavayuh), directly like the mendicant woman or through proper channel like the fiery-spies who did so through the 'class mates'. They had

9. Arthasastra, Bk. I, Ch. XI
10. Ibid., Ch. XII
their own codes and the officers of the organisation collected, collated and verified the information received from different sources. The 'wandering' and 'institute' spies were not to know each other. 11

From the military angle "Merchant-spies inside the forts, saints and ascetics in the suburbs of the forts; the cultivator and the realuse in country parts; herd-men in the boundaries of the country; in forest - forest dwellers; Sramanas, and chiefs of wild tribes, shall be stationed to ascertain the movements of enemies." 12 Counter intelligence measures were entrusted to all the above types of spies, each type operating against same category of enemy spies. 13

Spies were employed on a very large scale in the enemy territory to rive dissensions and cause delusions amongst the chief functionaries of the state by false predictions like 'You are possessed of all physiognomical characteristic of a king or queen'. The services of harlots and women of charm were made use of to cause rivalries amongst the courtiers of the enemy king. Dispersion of enemy's power and resources could be caused by merchant-spies in the guise of contractors for making supplies for expeditions, by giving false reports about preparations and readiness for move. 14 Deaths of commanders of various arms were caused through sabotage; loyalties were won

11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid, Bk.XII, Ch. II
over by promises of position, gold and land and rebellions; mutinies generated by seducing wild tribes and government officials and destruction of enemy resources by fires caused by the mechanisation of spies. To crown it all, the fiery spies, dare-devils of the first rank, were employed to carry out raids on the enemy's rear; clandestine operations behind the enemy lines like letting off cruel beasts, poisonous snakes, flooding the enemy defensive areas by breaking dams or rivers; carrying out lightening raids on enemy Capitals, and laying ambuscades.

When the war was about to commence or was already in progress, the spies in the garb of astrologers, forecast the victory of own forces and failure of the enemy plans.

Although our knowledge about the espionage and secret services between 600-1200 A.D. is very meagre, yet what we learn from the records of our period and knowing that it is indispensable for the effective functioning of the state, we may safely conclude that the service must have thrived whatever shape and organizational garb it may have assumed. Magha and Candra the later Indian polity writers more or less stuck to the arrangements suggested by their master Kautilya.

15. Ibid., Ch. III, p. 421-35
16. Ibid., Bk X, Ch. VI, p. 422
17. Ibid., Bk XII, Ch. III; Ch. V
18. The Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXXVI, 4, 1960, p. 244
19. Sisupalavadha, II, 82, 113; XX 23
20. Dasatmäracarita, quoted Chakravarty, p. 73
21. Kam. XII - 25-49, Yuktikalpātara, pp. 9-10; Nitiyakya, pp. 53-55
"A blind prince may see through the eyes of his spies, but an ignorant king is always in the dark," wrote the author of the Garuda Purana. Bana talks about the employment of spies by Harsh, who were called Sarvagatas. Kashmir had a regular department of espionage and the spies were variously known as 'Cakrika, Piśuma and Pumścalaka.' The tīkṣṇa or the fiery spies were employed by Lalitāditya Muktapiṭha for the murder of the Guada King. During the reign of Suravarman II (A.D. 939), Kamalavardhana who had risen in rebellion against him, informed by the spies, immediately reached the gates of the capital to forestall any move by the king.

The spies were also seen playing their traditional role i.e., planning assassination of a rebel chief. During a war of succession in Gujarat, between Kumarapala on one side and Bahaṇḍa supported by Anorāja, the former was informed by his spies that the latter had arrived with his troops on the western frontiers of Gujarat. It is gathered from the extant portions of Lalita-Vigrahārājanātaka that the spies of king Vigrahārāja-deva of Sakambhari had gone and returned after collecting information from the camp of Hammira. The enemy information was collected with the help of spies is also proved from

22. Garuda Purana, Ch. CXI, p. 329 (Eng Tr) by M.N. Dutt Sastrī
23. Mookerjee, R.K., Harsha, p. 94
25. Rājatarangini, Bk. IV, S’ 323
26. Ibid., Bk. V, S’ 451
27. Ibid., Bk. VIII, S’ 3211
29. Indian Antiquary, Vol. XX, p. 201
Rudradeva's Anam Konda inscription of 12th century A.D. 30 The Prthvirāja-Rāsaśau informs us that, "Having come to Revātāta, Chahuven heard about the great Gori, that in great secrecy the Sultan has prepared an army; for his spies (ānta) have informed him that the Sambhali Rāja is enjoying fine sport in Revātāta...." 31

Somdevasuri also speaks about a spy, named Sākhanaka, who is "introduced, and is heralded by his followers, accomplices in the guise of mendicants etc. as a pastmaster in creating friendship and enmities." 32

Further, he explains a particular class of spies called sattrīputras and says that they "go out and by their manifold and out of the way accomplishments in magic, astrology, music, dance etc. help the plans of the king or try to save the king, and create friendships or enmities as they desire." 33 A classic example of the Vital role played by the spies is provided by the 'Hammira-Madamardana' of Jayasimha Suri of early thirteenth century A.D. This relates to the most uneviable situation in which once Vīradhavala had been placed. "The Yadava Singhma having been joined by Samrāmasimha (Sākha), was marching from the South to attack his kingdom; the Maiva king, Devapāla was advancing from the East and the Turbokas were already at the northern gate of his realm." Under that situation

30. Indian Antiquary, Vol. XX, pp. 201-212
33. Ibid., p. 369
Viradhevala, leaving the protection of his Eastern and Southern boundaries to the care of his minister Vastupāla advanced to settle his score with the Turuska Kammīra-Vīra-Mīlacakīkara. Vastupāla engaged two brothers Nipunaka and Suvega to affect split into the enemy camp. One brother took up his job of a horse keeper with the Mālva king and the other with the Yādava king. Singhana was persuaded by the spy to "cease all hostilities until Viradha-vala should have spent his strength in fighting against the Turuskas ........... The other spy, Suvega, had meanwhile obtained a horse with the name of 'Devapāla' to be presented to Samgrāmasimha, and forged a letter under the signature of the Mālva king, in which Samgrāmasimha was urged to revenge his father's death by destroying the Yādava army in its entirety when Devapāla would fall upon them at the time of their entrance into Gujarāt.......... Suvega assumed the dress of a mendicant and allowed himself to be caught by the Yādava army who brought him at once before the king. Singhana fell into the trap, "learning this," Samgrāmasimha fled away in fear. Singhana at once marched against Mālva, where he was opposed by its powerful forces". The two spies having accomplished their mission fled to Gujarāt with the happy tidings.34 This was then Kautilya's thought coming to life more than a millennium and a quarter after he probably first preached his theories.

Mahmūd of Ghazna had a full fledged department of secret service called Divān-i-Shughl-i-Ishrāf-i-Mamlukat. Mushrifs or secret agents had been appointed all over the country side to obtain useful information through the agency of slaves, about

34. Ganguly, D.C., History of the Parmāra Dynasty, pp. 215-17
their masters. Spies of both sexes travelled far and wide to gather information for the Sultan. A number of Mushrifs (Mushrifān-i-Dargah) were also posted in the Royal Court to keep a strict watch over the activities of courtiers, ministers and even princes. Special Mushrifs were appointed to write down the reports of junior Mushrifs. They were men of unimpeachable integrity, and loyalty, were well paid and had the privilege of being appointed by the Sultan himself. For the speedy transmission of information of spies, a regular postal service existed under the Sāhib-Barīd, who was the official news writer at every provincial head-quarter. He kept the Sultan well informed about all happenings especially with regard to the conduct of commanders and other high officials. He transmitted his reports in cypher to the head of the intelligence service (Sāhib-i-Diwān-i-Ishraq-i-Mamlūk), through ordinary mounted courtiers (Askudārg) and special messengers according to the precedence and classification of the message. When provincial commanders revolted against the central authority, and did not allow free flow of information, the Sāhib-Barīd showed lot of pluck and ingenuity and had the message passed through spies, who "disguised as travellers, traders, Sūfis or apothecaries, carried the news letter sewn into the saddle-cloth, or hidden in the soles of their shoes or handles of implements of daily use specially made hollow for this purpose." 35

The Hindus also had their own system of express couriers for carrying official messages and letters. Bāña was called to

the court of Harsa through the famous courier Mehkhala. Prabhakarvardhana sent a special courier to his son-in-law at the back of a camel. We hear of Kurangaka carrying a letter to Harsa from his father. On returning home and finding his father in a critical condition, Harsa "in hot haste despatched express couriers and swift camel-riders one after another to procure his brother's coming." That communication by this method was "pretty swift is shown from the fact that a messenger from Assam delivered a letter at Nalanda after two days."