CHAPTER - III

CAVALRY
The beginnings of cavalry are discernible in the adjunct and concomitant of the celebrated chariot of the post Rigvedic India, where it was assigned the role of a sentinel of the war-cars and flank-guard of the elephantry, and used for charges when the "throne was too dense and mixed for the employment of war-cars. Then the agile and single horseman could do good work on the herd of frightened foot-soldiers, unimpeded by fear of heavier foes." ¹ The cavalry had emerged into a distinct arm by the time Alexander came kicking the dust unto the historic fields of the Hydaspes. By the times of Kautilya, it had grown in stature and importance. Its chief value in rapidity and mobility and impetuosity as its characteristic quality, had come to be recognised. It could open gaps in enemy arrays and thereby show roads to success and complete the victory by "carrying off prisoners and trophies, pursuing the enemy, rapidly succouring a threatened point, over-throwing disordered infantry, covering retreats.......",² and so on.

As a result of the realization that the horse had a decisive role in turning the fortunes of war, its strength increased rapidly in proportion and large cavalry forces came to be possessed by the rulers of our period. Harṣavardhana kept a cavalry force of 100,000 horse men, Jayapāla 12,000,³ the cavalry of Vidyādhara Chandella has been assessed at 36,000

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² Hitle, Jomini's Art of War, p. 151
³ Watters, T., On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, p. 343
⁴ Elliot, & Dowson, Vol. II, p. 25
by Gardizi, Nizamuddin and Firishta. Anandpal was in a position to send 10,000 cavaliers as reinforcement to Mahmud, Parmaras had thirty to forty thousand cavalry even when they were on their last legs; and Vigraharaaja IV had 100,000 horsemen under him when he marched against Hammir. Kanauj was well known for its superior cavalry. The occurrence of the term 'Hayapati' for Devapal Pratihar in the Chandella inscription probably indicates that the Pratiharas continued to enjoy among their contemporaries a reputation for maintaining an excellent cavalry and were regarded as 'lords of horses' par excellence.'

The vast cavalry forces grew inspite of the fact that the horses of indigenous breed were of poor quality. Kautilya thought that 'The breed of Kamboja, Sindhu, Aratta and Vanayu countries are the best; those of Bahlka, Papeya, Sauvira and Teitala are of middle quality; and the rest ordinary (avarah). This was still true in our period and the kings took pains to procure horses of the best quality from their breeding grounds.

Harsa had his horses of the best breed from 'vanayu, Aratta, Kamboja, Bharadvaaja, Sindh and Persia-red, dark, white, bay, chestnut drappled like partridges..... with .........round delicate well proportioned throats, with long upraised carved

5. Mishra, Y., The Hindu Shabis of Panjab and Afghanistan, p.201
7. Ganguly, D.C., History of the Parmara Dynasty, p. 245
8. Dashrath Sharma, Early Chauhan Dynasties, p. 213
10. Mishra, Y., The Hindu Shabis of Afghanistan and the Panjab, p. 77,
11. Arthasastra, Bk II Ch XXX
necks like sacrificial posts, with their shoulders stout and robust at the joints, their chests full and projecting, their legs thin hard like masses of iron...... They were with difficulty fixed tightly in the ground on both sides, and they seemed to grow longer as they struggled...."\textsuperscript{12} And again, "The place seemed all in waves with the plunging horses as they leaped unto the sky in anger against the horses of the Sun's chariot....... and challenged Indra's horses to a contest...."\textsuperscript{13}

Somesvara in the 12th century A.D. classified horses on the basis of the land of their origin as under:\textsuperscript{14}

(a) \textbf{The Best Quality} -
Kāmbaja, Yavan, Teji, Bālahika, Chatala, Tokhāraka, and Sakakēnū.

(b) \textbf{The Good Quality} -
Pūbhara, Kāndley, Yaudheya, Vaśpēyaka, Vaṇayuja and Pārsīka.

(c) \textbf{Middle Quality} -
Taittila, Vatsa, Kāndhara, Vaśpēyya, Saindhava, Savitra, Parvōteya, Kashmir, Sambatīyaka, Kulaja, Nihāra, Saṃsarga, Turūskaka and also Teji, which had two qualities.

(d) \textbf{Poor Quality} -
Medaka, Arjuneya, Traigarta, Gurjara, Rājas, Avanteya, Saurāśṭra, etc. The horses of Sind were known for

\textsuperscript{12} Cowell & Thomas, \textit{The Vārṣa-Carīta}, pp. 50-51
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 46
\textsuperscript{14} Somesvaras \textit{Mānasollāsa}, \textit{A Cultural Study}, by S.S. Mishra, pp. 353-356
their breed even amongst the Arabs. According to the Chach-Nāmā, when Muawiya appointed Abdu-lla bin Swariya to the government of Sind, he informed him that: "in the country of Sind there is a mountain which they call Kaikanan. There the horses stand very high, and are well made in all their proportions. They have before this time been received among the spoils taken from that tract ....."\(^{15}\) They were of good quality, hardy and able to perform long journeys at an ambling pace.

Saptāsatabhumi, kingdom of Nadol was also extolled as a mine of horses.\(^{16}\) Balban felt that the horses of Siwalik, Silm, Samānā, Bhatinda, Bhatnīr and the territories of Khokharas, Jāts and Mandaharan supplied to him best Hindi Horses and hence he felt that he could do without horses of the Mongol territories.\(^{17}\)

But still the finest horses were obtained from Quital, Kandhār and even Persia.\(^{18}\) The rulers of Kashmir whose stability depended upon the cavalry, spent huge sums in importing thorough bred of foreign countries.\(^{19}\)

This superiority of foreign breed of horses was popular estimation even in the 13th century A.D. when horses were imported from Turkistan, Russia, Iraq and Bahrain.\(^{20}\)

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15. Elliot and Dowson, Vol.I, p. 423  
16. Dushrath Sharma, Early Raiyut Dynasties, p. 214  
17. Barmi, Tarikh-i Firuzshahi (Tr in Hindi) by A.A. Rizwi, History of Khelias, p. 161  
19. Rājatranjini, IV 265, 415; V 143-44; VII 394,403,910, 1510-12; VIII 9,73,199,941 and so on.  
20. Nizami, K.A., Studies in Medieval Indian History and Culture, p. 9; C.V.Vaidya, History of Medieval Hindu India, p. 243
Another classification of horses was provided by Kautilya based on the size of face, their circumference etc.

"The face (mukha) of the best horse measures 32 angulas, its length is 5 times its face, its shank is 20 angulas; and its height is 4 times its shank. Horses of medium and lower sizes fall short of the above measurement by two and three angulas respectively. The circumference (parinaha) of the best horse measures 100 angulas, and horses of medium and lower sizes fall short of the above measurement by five parts." 21

Sukra classified horses on the basis of the length of their head, the appearance of their face and the presence of auspicious or inauspicious feathers.

"A feather is turned in two ways, either to the right or left, if full or not full, and is further in a two-fold manner long or short. The left and right-side feathers of mares and stallions are respectively auspicious, but not these if they are on opposite sides........... the horse on whose tip of the nose, forehead, temple, throat or skull exists a feather are the best. Those horses are regarded as middling, which have it on the heart, shoulder, neck, likewise on the hips, on the naval belly and fore-ribs..... The two feathers which on a horse's cheeks are seen standing are called augmentors of fame and are esteemed as augmentors of kingship........" But "A horse on whose left cheek is observed a feather standing, is called

21. Arthasastra, Bk II Ch XXX
Sarvanāma, and it may wish for the destruction of its master..... that bad (feather) on the left side of the heart produces loss of wealth...... If at the extremity of the belly of the horse are two curved feathers, that will surely incur death or cause the destruction of its master.... if a feather is on the penis of the horse, it ruins victory and prosperity." But "A horse which has two feathers on the root of the ear, or which has also two on the middle of the breast.... give glory in time of war.22

This belief in auspicious and inauspicious marks of horses was widely prevalent in the 11th and 12th centuries also. The Rājatarangini records numerous instances of horses with auspicious marks. During the reign of Harṣa (1089-1101 A.D.) while advancing on Srinagar, Uccala captured a horse of auspicious marks, near Varahmula (Baramula) which appeared to represent good fortune.23 The Dāmras of Lohara while marching against Sussala (1112-20 A.D.), captured a fine horse which was believed to have bolted from the king's force, and thought that the royal fortune had smiled on them.24

Another classifications based on the features and size of the horse has come down to us from the Garuda Purāṇa. The best horse, according to it, should measure upwards of four cubits in length, the middle category three and a half cubits

22. Śukranītisāra (Tr and reproduced by Gustav Oppert) On the Weapons Army Organisation and Political Maxims of the Ancient Hindus, pp. 90 ff
23. Rājatarangini, VII, 1208
24. Ibid., VIII, 731
Horses with long limbs, short ears, of mouse-colour and of long life are the best. Those which are crow-lipped, black tongued, bear-faced..., hot palated or fierce toothed, are possessed of a greater or smaller number of teeth than what they naturally possess, or born with only one testicle or afflicted with scrotal tumours or possessed of deformed backs or bifurcated hoofs or teats, or footed like cats....or are eyed like cats or monkeys, should be regarded as inauspicious and unfit for use. 

The early Muslim invaders also attached great importance to the auspicious or inauspicious marks of the horses.

It is not necessary for us to trace the origin of bridle and saddle as the equipment of the horses in India. From Sanchi and Mathura sculptures, it is known that horses were bedecked and the stirrups were also used. The paintings of Ajanta caves No. 1 and 17 bring out clearly that there were two different modes of guiding horses in the fourth century A.D., one with the bit and the other without it; and this practice continued for many centuries.

Sukra described bridle thus: "the two upwards and side ways pointing parts of a bridle-bit are respectively on the whole, twelve angulas long with two inside but very strong

26. Fakhr-i-Vudhir, Adabu-l Farh Vasabahjat, Tr (Hindi) by S.A.A. Rizvi, p. 258
27. Bajpai, K.P., Mathura, 1955, pl. 18
pieces, and are joined with rings for reins both for stopping and pulling back; with such a bridle-bit one may manage a horse." 29

According to Hopkins, the use of saddle for the horse is of very late date in India and during the days of the Mahābhārata only blanket (Kambala) was used as a covering and they were often found scattered in the battle field at the end of day's fight. 30 However, saddle with stirrups can be distinctly seen on Sānci and Mathura horses; 31 the horses of Ajanta Cave I also have saddle on them. The horses on Gupta gold coins of horseman type show well caprisoned horses. It may, however, be admitted that although saddle was possessed by most gentlemen cavaliers, its usage was not so common to permit every horse rider to have a saddle at least till the 11th century A.D. When Alberuni wrote that Indians, "ride without a saddle, but if they put on a saddle, they mount the horse from its right side." 32 It may be that the use of saddle was considered as a mark of distinction and only the upper-classes used it.

About the armour of the horse and weapons of the horseman, suffice it may be to mention here that, the horses were, at times, provided with the armour. The Rājatarangini mentions

29. Sukraniti, Tr by Gustav Opprtrt, p. 102
31. Maisey, Sānci and its remains, Pl. VI, Fig. 2; Pl. IX, Fig. 2; Pl. XI, XI, XXII, See also Cunningham, The Stupa of Bharhut, Pl. XXXII
33. Chakrvarty, The Art of Warfare in Ancient India, p. 40
armour-clad horses. The coins of the shāhīs also confirm this view. In forming an array of the horses, according to Kautilya the front should be occupied by "horses with mail armour." The riders too had mail armour as is seen from the "bull and horsemen" type of coins of the shāhīs of Chind. The leather cuirass so well known to the fiery horsemen of the scourge Chingez khan, was in use by the cavaliers of Kashmir. Long lances and swords were carried by the Cavaliers; lances for the charge and the swords for the melee. The kurram plates talk of "squadrons of horsemen connected by their swords that had struck each other's heads." The Rājatarangini mentions sabres and stone inscription of Jainad, a parshāra king of 11th century A.D. ascribes lances, swords and nooses to the cavalry. We shall talk of the weapons and armour in detail in a separate chapter, but we like to mention at this place that the bow was not the weapon of the horseman and mounted-archery was conspicuous by its absence during this period. The bow was highly esteemed, but it was a matchless weapon of the infantry and chariots of by-gone ages. The Śiva Mānusvēda, a treatise on archery does not talk about mounted-archers. The

34. Rājatarangini, VIII 1187
35. Smith, Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum, Pl. XXVI, Fig. 1 quoted by P.C. Chakravarty, p. 40
36. Arthaśāstra, Bk X Ch. 5
37. Smith, Pl. XXVI, op.cit.
38. Rājatarangini, VI 248-49
39. Chakravarty; The Art of Warfare in Ancient India, p. 40
41. Rājatarangini, VIII, 947-53
42. Epigraphia Indica, Vol. XX, p. 63
skill had no doubt been imported into India by the Scythians and the Parthian satraps as seen from their coins, and also from those of Chandragupta and Kumāragupta I who are seen riding well-captured horses and holding bows in their hands. But "the art of mounted archery did not strike deep roots in the Indian soil. Introduced by the Parthians and continuing for a time as a sickly exotic, it withered away shortly after the Gupta period." 45

Not withstanding the above lacuna a lot of care was taken to train the horses. Regular training was considered to be training for war. There were several forms of riding the horse, circular movements, slow movements which were performed in sixteen different ways. The horses were trained to jump like a monkey, a frog, jumping suddenly and also with one leg leaping as a cuckoo and like a crane were different forms of jumping. There were several forms of gallop like that of a vulture, water-duck, running like a peacock, dashing like a mongoose and a hog. There were also a numerous kind of trot (dārā) trotting according to strength (vikrama) trot combined with circular movement (valgita), ordinary trot (upakṣaṇa), middle most speed (upājaya) and ordinary speed. The diet of the horses was changed in accordance with the season, and veterinary doctors applied remedies against over or under weight. Those employed to look-after the stables were

43. Smith, Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, pp. 43-44
44. Allan, Gupta Coins, Pl. XIII, 11-19
45. Chakravarty, p. 42
46. Kautilya's Arthasastra, Bk II Ch. XXX
to forfeit their salaries and pay fines for the dereliction of their duties. The horses were to be bathed, sprinkled with sandal powder and garlanded twice a day. Various sacrifices and Pūjās were to be performed on new moon days and at the commencement and termination of the journeys. The maximum distance which a horse could traverse in a day was laid down as five, eight, or ten Yojanas (Yojana = \(\frac{5}{44}\) miles) according to the quality of the breed.

How long the horses continued to be trained with such extreme care, is difficult to say but the references to the terminology of Kautiliya by the records of our period do go to show that his system of training of horses was known to the later generations. The vādnagar Prasasti of Chaulukya Kumārapāla states that Bhīma of Gujarāt, was very revengeful against his enemies "What wonder was there that his horses, supremely skilled in accomplishing the five paces (called dhārā) quickly gained dhārā, the Capital of the King of Malava?" The Anāmkonda inscription of 1084 Saka era (1162 A.D.) says that Rudradeva's Cavalry had all the excellent characteristics of the famous writings on the subject and "trained in five kinds of paces (Panca-dhārā)." The Śisupālavadha also speaks of the 'dhārā' in which a cavalier was busy training his horse. However, new terminology of horse-training had been developed

47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
51. Indian Antiquary, Vol. XI, p. 20
52. Śisupālavadha, Ch.V 60 (Tr in Hindi) R.P. Tripathi, p. 143
by the Agni Purāṇa, but it is not easy to understand their full import.  

Kauṭilya assigned a very important role to the cavalry -
"Exploration on occupied positions, camps and forests, holding strategic positions, water, fording places, and positions . . . . destruction or protection of the commissariat and of troops arriving afresh, supervision of the discipline of the army; lengthening the line of the army; protecting the sides of the army; first attack; dispersion (of the enemy’s army); trampling it down; defence; seizing, letting it out; causing the army to take a different direction; carrying the treasury and the princes; falling against the rear of the enemy; chasing the timid; pursuit and concentration." With the passage of time, its utility and vital role in warfare of the period came to be recognised by all and sundry. It represented mobility of the army, war became a sport and enemy even at a long distance could be reached easily. According to the Mānasollāsa "The cavalry is the key to fame; a king in possession of a strong cavalry need entertain no apprehension regarding his territory."  

Although cavalry became very important limb of the army yet it never achieved high standard and the defeat of Indian armies at the hands of foreign invaders from 326 B.C. to 1192

53. Agni Purāṇa, 238, 60–62
54. Arthasāstra, Gk X, Ch.IV
55. Somdeva Suri’s Nitiyakhyaṁṛta, pp. 83–84
56. Somesavara’s Mānasollāsa, I, 81, V 574
or more appropriately 1194 A.D., was largely due to the
inferiority of this arm. "Mounted-archers were a source of
serious danger to Indian armies." The opponents against whom
they were pitted, were all well trained and disciplined horse-
archers who had thorough breeds to ride, seasoned in numerous
campaigns and were superior in manoeuvrability.

The Turkomān horse excelled even the proverbial Arabian
horse and was "the noblest in the whole of central Asia and
surpasses all other breeds in speed and endurance, intelligence
and faithfulness and a marvellous sense of locality............
is tall with a long narrow body, long thin legs and neck ...... on
their expeditions the Turkomāns often cover 650 miles in
the waterless desert in five days .... They owe their power to
the training of thousands of years in the endless steppes and
deserts, and to the continual plundering raids which demanded
the utmost endurance and privation of which horse and rider
were capable."58

Their weapons were bows, battle-axes, maces, lances,
sabres and long, curved swords.59 These were then the type of
horse and his rider against which the Indian cavalier with no
bow and inferior breed had to contend.

57. Basham, A.L., The Wonder that was India, p. 130
58. Cambridge, Medieval History, Vol.I, p. 331; Indian
Historical Journal 1973, p. 472
59. Ibid.