

Construction of Durga in the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya— A study

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Abstract: A military building designed to be defended from attack, consisting of an area surrounded by a strong wall, in which soldiers are based is called a *durga*, i.e., fort. From very early history to modern times, forts have been often necessary for cities to survive in an ever-changing world of invasion and conquest. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya is an ancient Indian Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, political science, economic policy and military strategy. The author of the *Arthaśāstra* also gives stress on the construction of *durga*. The *Arthaśāstra* discusses the creation of *durga* which can be of various forms depending upon the topography of the kingdom. Because of its importance a lot of care has been taken towards the construction of the *durgas* as has been discussed in the *Arthaśāstra*.

Keywords: Durga, Arthaśāstra, Kauṭilya, Statecraft, Architecture.

Introduction

Political philosophers of ancient India have considered *dūrḡa*, i.e., fort one of the seven elements of the state. The ancient kings attached very great importance to fortresses, for they served as the main base to defend the kingdom against the invasions of the enemy. The capital city of every ruling chief is surrounded by fortifications either natural or artificial. The *Rgvedasamhita* refers to the fort.¹ The words *pur* and *pura* occur in the *Saṁhitā*² and later Vedic texts³ in the sense of rampart and fort. The owner of *pur* is called *purapati*.⁴ The term *mahāpura*, i.e., great fort occurs in the *Taittirīyasamhitā*⁵ and *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*.⁶ In the annual sacrifice portion of the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* the three Agnis or fires are described as forming three forts to prevent the *asuras* from disturbing the sacrifice.⁷ In the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa*⁸, the *upāsadas* are described as the citadel of the *asuras*, the enemies of *devas*. It may therefore be said that the use of forts was well known to the people of Vedic age.

Construction of Durga in the Arthaśāstra

Durga plays a significant role in the kingdom. It is the *durga* through which the king can secure his state from external invasion and plunder. So, the king should construct the *durgas* in a systematic way. The author of the *Arthaśāstra* also gives stress on the construction of *durga*. The *Arthaśāstra* discusses the creation of *durga* which can be of various forms depending upon the topography of the kingdom. The *durgas* due to its location and its strategic relevance in case of providing security to kingdom had been perpetually remained under the control of army. Because of its importance a lot of care has been taken towards the construction of the *durgas* as has been discussed in the *Arthaśāstra*.

There are four types of *durga* as mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra*. The *udakadurga*, i.e., water fort. A water fort is that wherein a place is surrounded by natural lakes or a hollow place which is not easily accessible. The *pārvatadurga*, i.e., mountain fort. The mountain fort is that part where the place is surrounded by stones or pebbles or a cave in a mountain. The *dhānvadurga*, i.e., desert fort and the *vanadurga*, i.e., forest fort. The *dhānvadurga* is that type where there is no wa-

ter available or overgrown with thickets growing in barren soil. The *vanadurga* is a forest fort where the place is mostly marshy being full of mire or full of thickets which makes movement difficult. Kauṭilya further states that *udakadurga* and *giridurga* are places for the protectors of the country. While a *dhānvadurga* and a *vanadurga* are places for foresters or places of retreat in times of calamity.⁹ In the *R̥gvedasamhitā*, *gomatī*,¹⁰ i.e., a fort full of kine, *śatabhuji*,¹¹ i.e., cities with hundred walls, *śārādī*,¹² i.e., autumnal forts are mentioned. In the *R̥gvedasamhitā*¹³ references to the *pur carīṣṇu*, i.e., moving fort also found. Which may be an engine for assaulting strongholds, but sometimes it was like a kind of chariot. The *Manusmṛti* gives a slightly different enumeration of six kinds of forts, viz., *dhanvadurga*, *mahādurga*, *abdurga*, *vārṣadurga*, *nrdurga* and *giridurga*.¹⁴ The *Śukranīti* also classifies the fort into six categories, viz., *pārikha*, which is surrounded on all sides by great ditches; *pārigha* is well protected by walls. The *vanadurga* is made in dense forest encircled by huge thorns and cluster of trees etc., the *dhanvadurga* is known to be situated in a place round about which no water is found. The *jaladurga* is surrounded by great sheets of water while the *giridurga* is made of high level with supply of water in plenty. Śukra again divides the fort into two categories, viz., *sainyadurga* and *sahāyadurga*. Both of these are regarded as ornaments of all forts without which other forts are no use to the king. It is asserted that the fort with troops is the best while the others are auxiliaries to this. The king therefore is advised to have this fort first.¹⁵ A mutual dependence among different kind of forts and their resourcefulness is highly emphasized by Śukra. The king is advised to have all these forts well provided with all types of materials necessary in wars.¹⁶ The *Matsyapurāṇa*,¹⁷ mentioned six kinds of forts, viz., *dhanvadurga*, *mahādurga*, *naradurga*, *vākṣa* or *vṛkṣadurga*, *ambudurga*, *giridurga*. Among these fort *giridurga* is considered as the best. The *Agnipurāṇa*¹⁸ also gives same division like *Matsyapurāṇa*.

Regarding the construction of *durga* Kauṭilya has stipulated that a king should establish his fortified head-quarters in the centre of the country. The site should be recommended by the experts in the science of building.¹⁹ These should be built in an architecturally ideal place or on the confluence of rivers or on the proximity of a lake with unending water sources or on the banks of large ponds and tanks. The construction of these should be circular, rectangular or square in shape surrounded by three rows of ditches with a distance of one *daṇḍa*, i.e., six feet between each of them. The respective width of these three ditches is fourteen, twelve and ten *daṇḍas*. The depth of these ditches should be less than one quarter or one half of their width. The bottom of these ditches is square in size and the top is one third of wide. The sides of these ditches are built with bricks or stones which is filled with flowing water and there should have lotus plants and crocodiles in the water.²⁰ The *Mahābhārata*²¹ and the *Kāmandakīya Nītisāra*²² however mention around the fort only one ditch which should be deep. The *Mahābhārata* does not mention the lotus but prescribes not only crocodiles but also sharks in the ditches.²³

In the *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya also mentioned that at a distance of four *daṇḍa*, i.e., twenty-four feet from the first ditch, a rampart should be erected by heaping mud upwards. The height and breadth of the rampart should be six and twelve *daṇḍa* i.e., thirty-six feet and seventy-two feet respectively. In the Śrīmūlā commentary of T. Gaṇapati Śāstrī it is said that *ūrdhvacayam adhaḥ sthūlo-parikṛśamūrdhvacayākhyam mañcaprṣṭham uparyadhastācca tulyavaipulyam*

mañcaprṣṭhākhyam kumbhakuṣikam vā ūrdhvādhaḥ kṛṣam madhyasthūlam kumbhakuṣikākhyam vā | T. Gaṇapati Śāstrī means that *ūrdhvacayam*, *mañcaprṣṭham* and *kumbhakuṣikam* are the different types of ramparts. The *ūrdhvacayam* is thick at the bottom and thin at the top. The *mañcaprṣṭham* is equally thick from top to bottom. The middle portion of *kumbhakuṣikam* is thick and top and bottom portion is thin. The rampart should be made hard by the trampling of elephants and bulls. Clusters of thorny bushes and poisonous creepers should be planted on the rampart.²⁴

There shall be parapets over the rampart which are built of backed bricks and raised to a height of twice their breadth. Kauṭilya says that the parapet wall should be wide enough so that a chariot can easily move. The shape of the parapet also mentioned by Kauṭilya. He says that the shape of the parapet should be like a palm tree, thick at the bottom and thin at the top. The shape of the top should be like a drum and monkey's head.²⁵

Outside the ramparts passages for the movements of enemies shall be closed with concealed objects to form obstruction such as *jānu-bhañjanī*, i.e., a kind of trap to catch the enemies, *triśūla*, pits, thorny bushes filled into pits, replicas of snakes and palm leaves made of iron, triangles, obstacles resembling the teeth of dogs, rods, ditches filled with thorny objects covered with sand, frying pans and water pools.²⁶ Kauṭilya also mentioned four kinds of gates of fort, viz., *gopuram*, *puṣkarinī*, *kumārīpuram*, *muṇḍaka*. The *gopuram* gate should be shaped like a lizard's mouth. By digging a well in the middle of parapet *puṣkarinī* gate should be constructed. The *kumārīpuram* gate should be made with four halls at a distance of one and half *daṇḍa* from each other. The *muṇḍaka* gate should be two storeyed building without any ornamental dome with an appropriate door according to the availability of the building materials.²⁷

Conclusion

From the textual evidences of *Arthaśāstra* it proves that Kauṭilya was concerned with *vāstu* and provided a comprehensive account of the science of architecture with a scientific mind on minute details. As Kauṭilya was primarily concerned with the establishment and proper maintenance of the kingdom, he considered the construction forts, instructions regarding the proper locations, types of forts, their shapes, security norms, gates utmost importance. Thus, it can be concluded that the textual evidences on *vāstu* in the *Arthaśāstra* amply prove that Kauṭilya, the great visionary, had dealt with the architecture most scientifically.

Endnotes

1. *Rgvedasamhitā*, 1.33.12; 1.53.7; 1.61.5; 1.63.7; 1.103.3; 4.16.1
2. *Ibid.*, 1.53.7; 1.131.4; 1.166.8; 3.15.14; 4.27.1
3. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, 1.7.7.5
4. *Rgvedasamhitā*, 1.173.10
5. *Taittirīyasamhitā*, 6.2.3.1
6. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 1.4.6
7. *Ibid.*, 2.2.1
8. *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa*, VIII.8
9. *Arthaśāstra*, II.3.1-2
10. *Rgvedasamhitā*, 8.6.23
11. *Ibid.*, 7.15.14
12. *Ibid.*, 1.131.4
13. *Ibid.*, 8.1.2-8

14. *Manusmṛti*, VII.70
15. *Śukranīti*, IV.6.1-8
16. *Ibid.*, IV.12-14
17. *Matsyapurāṇa*, 217.6-7
18. *Agnipurāṇa*, 222.4-5
19. *Arthaśāstra*, II.3.3
20. *Ibid.*, II.3.4
21. *Śānti Parva*, 67.45
22. *Kāmandakīya Nītisāra*, IV.57
23. *Śānti Parva*, 67.45
24. *Arthaśāstra*, II.3.5
25. *Ibid.*, II.3.7
26. *Ibid.*, 2.3.15
27. *Ibid.*, 2.3.31-32

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