

The Mahabharata is a well-known historical story that Indians are familiar with. Did you know that the original Mahabharata was called Jaya? This was a poem of triumph told of the victory of one king over another. You may have read about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's battle against Afzal Khan at Jawali. You have also studied history of the battles of Panipat. In the First Battle of Panipat Babur used firearms. This was the first time that firearms were used in battle in India. Babur had used guns mounted on camels while Tipu Sultan used rockets against the British in 1780s.

In the history of Maharashtra you would have read about the method of warfare used by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The form of warfare that he used was called guerrilla warfare. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj understood the geography of the region. The Sahyadri range in the West with spurs going eastwards has cut the Deccan into many small isolated compartments. Invading armies from the North are slowed down by the terrain. This region was excellent for guerrilla warfare.

In the period of the British colonial rule the Indian army had participated in the First and the Second World Wars. After independence, the first war that India experienced took place in Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Later India experienced wars with China and again with Pakistan. The Indian Army, Air Force and Navy have benefitted from the experiences of these wars.

Wars are influenced by four important factors :

- 1. Geography :** Wars may be fought in mountainous regions or plains. They can be fought on the seas. The geography of the region where wars are fought would influence the tactics used in war. (We have discussed the role of geography in detail in the Chapter on Geopolitics).
- 2. The character or the morale of the people :** How does the population respond during war time? Does it support the armed forces or does it oppose or criticise them? The support of the local population is crucial to any war effort.
- 3. The leadership :** The leadership is at two levels. One is the political leadership and the other the military leadership. The political leadership has to take decisions by looking at both domestic and international factors. The military leadership has to formulate strategies. The leaders of the country and the Generals who conduct the war play an important part in the success or failure of any battle.
- 4. The equipment or weapons system that is used :** There has been a continuous evolution in the weapons systems. In the early historical period the weapons used were swords, shields, javelins etc. Today the technological changes have brought in new weapons like missiles, drones, etc. The mode of communication has also changed. From horses and mules used in ancient times we have railways, trucks, aircraft, etc.

The above mentioned factors influence the nature of war. But the study of military history is not just the study of war. What is the subject matter of military history ?

The study of military history involves the following :

1. **Elements :** One, it is the study of wars and all the elements that influence the nature of war. This includes geography, equipment, leadership, etc. as discussed above.
2. **Strategies :** We study the strategies used by the countries. From the point of view of the armed forces, we have to understand the tactics and the strategies used in war. Countries have their own military doctrines about how to face the enemy. Military history is studied at the various Armed Forces establishments. The purpose is to ensure that we do not repeat past mistakes, we improve upon its current performance by learning the lessons from the past.
3. **Diplomacy :** Some of the strategies are diplomatic. These are political strategies. This may include putting pressure on countries through threats or resolving problems through dialogue.
4. **Causes :** It is the study of the causes of war. There can be political, economic, cultural and other causes of war.
5. **Effects :** We study the effects of war. There is a huge loss of life and property. It has social and psychological effect on the people.

The discipline of military history is dynamic. It tries to understand the changes in society, economy and technology. Military history is an academic discipline. The core of the subject is the histories of war, both particular wars and the conduct

of war. A historian can look at the history of war from various angles. It can be looked at from the perspective of how the battle was fought or from the perspective of political leadership, economic issues, and socio-cultural dimensions.

Can we broadly define what military history is ?

Military history encompasses history of wars. It includes the study of prominent military leaders, the manner in which wars were fought and the military institutions. It also includes the connection with politics, economics, society, nature and culture.

Why Study Military History

All nations, big or small, try to ensure that their national interest is maintained. National security is the most important component of national interest. They are willing to go to war to protect their national interests. This has been the core of military history since ancient times. Military history covers a wide range of subjects. It will help us to understand why this subject needs to be studied. Let us look at some of them :

1. First, there is the relationship between war and the development of states. Look at the history of India. The introduction of Buddhism in India during the Ashokan Empire was a result of the Kalinga war. He was the first ruler to create an all India empire. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj fought against the Mughal rule to sow the seed of the Maratha Empire. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj introduced the idea of creating an 'Indian' empire. It was this idea that was carried forward by the Maratha Empire in later years.

2. Second, it helps us to study the relationship between war and the international order. The First World War brought in the League of Nations while the Second World War led to the creation of the United Nations. These organisations were created to maintain peace and order in the world. They tried to create a new world order in the world.
3. Third aspect is the impact of war on the society and culture. War brings great changes in the society. India experienced a war during the Partition of India in 1947. It had a profound impact on the Indian society. The people who migrated from Pakistan to India brought in a new lifestyle and culture. Wars result in migrations and that impacts the lifestyle of the local people.
4. What value does the study of military history bring to the armed forces ? Would the study of the World Wars or wars that India fought help the military to plan for a future war? The study of wars does not mean that the military leadership will follow the old tactics and strategies in the future. The real value of the study is the knowledge it provides to think strategically, logically and rationally. Strategy is the use of military to achieve political goals. The military commander must be able to think in a logical and rational manner as to what strategy to use. The study of military history provides this ability.

Indian Military History

Historical events of any country have to be understood with reference to the environmental conditions that influence it. Permanent factors of the environment are the topography of the land, availability of water and climate and seasons.

Let us take a look at some of the key trends in Indian military history from ancient times. This section will focus on the ancient, medieval and modern period of Indian history. You have already studied this history in school. What we will do here is highlight some of the issues that relate to military history of these periods.

Military History of Ancient India :

The Indus Valley Civilization is one of the oldest known civilizations in the world. The archaeological sites of Lothal, Dholavira, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa give some information of the weapons of that period. The cities of that period were well built. There appear to have been some fortifications. These were sturdy walls made with bricks. Evidence shows that archers were employed and knives have also been found. Their central military strategy was defensive in nature. It is believed that the Indus Valley civilization was defeated because of a defective military strategy.

India experienced the Persian invasions during 549 – 515 BCE and later Macedonian invasion by Alexander during 327 -325 BCE. The Macedonian form of warfare placed importance on cavalry and infantry with mounted archers. But it was characterised by brutality, massacre and enslavement of general population. The Mauryan army during the time of Ashoka placed importance on the infantry and archers. War elephants had played a significant role in the battle between Alexander and Paurava (Porus) (326 BCE). They continued to be important during the Maurayan period.

One of the most significant contributions on the system of warfare during that period was Kautilyas's Arthashastra. He talks of seven essential elements of the state: the King; Amatyas or Ministers and other officials; Janapada or geographical

territory; Durga or fort; Kosha or treasury; Danda or an army and Mitra or allies. He gives a detail analysis of battle strategies including battle formations, command and control, role of the commander, etc.

This phase also saw India's political and cultural expansion outside the traditional boundaries. The Cholas were able to spread their empire in the Bay of Bengal area in the areas of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar) and South East Asia.



Dholavira Fortifications



Ashokan Fortifications

Some of the features of the military system of ancient India can be stated as follows :

1. The military orientation was mainly defensive. Massive forts were built to protect the populace.

2. The state maintained a regular defence force, but the budget provided was very small.
3. The Maurya period saw a shift from the use of cavalry to use of elephants.
4. A unique feature of the Indian system of warfare was that the rules of war were followed. This made warfare humane and civilised.
5. It was during the rule of Ashoka that for the first time there was an all India empire. It has been described as a 'unified state'. This is because for the first time there was an all India administrative network.
6. India's maritime capabilities were seen during the Chola rule that created an empire in South East Asia.

Great Generals of Ancient India :

- The first great military leader we know was **King Sudasa** who won many battles against other Aryan tribes as well as the Dasas, Dasuyas and the Rakshas. He is supposed to have fought a combination of ten kings in a battle called the Dasrajan war sometime during 1200/1300 BCE.
- The Magadha empire produced several military leaders. **Ajatasatru**, **Mahapadam Nanda** and **Emperor Chandragupta** are known names. This was followed by **Emperor Ashoka** who gave the unique message of Dhama (Dharma). This empire extended from the Iranian border in the west to Bengal in the east and from Hindukush mountains to Karnataka in the south.
- The **Paurava King** who fought a great defensive battle against Alexander has not been given due recognition in India.
- In the second half of the First century a great general of the house of Chedi-rajavansa of Kalinga, **King Karavela** defeated rulers of Bengal and came upto Vidarbha. He defeated the Magadha army and plundered Rajagriha.

- The Guptas had several great military leaders. **Samudragupta** (345-380) created an empire from Central Punjab in the west to Assam in the east and included Andhra Pradesh and large parts of Madhya Pradesh. His son **Chandragupta Vikramaditya** (380-414) He expanded the Gupta empire to the region of lower Sindhu and advanced into Kabul. His son **Skandagupta** (456-467) continued the offensive in Punjab.
- **Lalitditya** (742-760) of Kashmir defeated the Tibetans on the north-east and the Kambojas and Turks in the north-west. His territories included Kangra, Taxila, Hazara, Poonch and Rajouri.
- **Chalukya Pulakesin II** (610-642) conducted campaigns against the Pallavas. He extended his kingdom to the shores of the Arabian sea and ensured the security of Gujarat and Malwa region.
- The Rashtrakuta kings **Dhruva** (780-793) and **Govinda III** (793-814) and Indra III (914-927) defeated the Palas of Bengal and Gurjara Pratiharas. Krishna III (939-967) firmly held the whole of the South and Deccan during his reign.

Foreign Invasions during Ancient Indian period :

- The Indus people were defeated because they did not give much importance to defence and security. They placed a lot of faith on fortifications which could not withstand the offensive tactics of the outsiders.
- The Persians captured the north western regions in the 6th century BCE. But they were not able to make a significant impact.
- Alexander's invasion during the 4th century BCE was limited by the resistance put up by the Pauravas.
- The Bactrian Greeks succeeded in capturing the north-western and the western parts of the country from the middle of the 2nd century.

- The Sakas, the Pahlavas and the Kushans followed. The former two were deprived of their empire by the Guptas. In the middle of the 4th century.
- The next invasion was by the Arabs who were inspired by their religious zeal.

What do you think? Discuss in class :

- There is an impression created by western historians that India has always submitted to invasions. Actually, ancient India did not suffer an unusually large number of invasions. In most cases Indian rulers were able to defend their regions.

Military History of Medieval India :

The Turkish invasions of India from the time of Mahmud of Gazni followed a pattern. These attacks usually took place between October and February. This is because the monsoons were over by October and the summer heat would begin after February. These invaders did not capture territory. They invaded and took back the loot. They were mounted archers who used composite bows.

From the 12th century onwards until the foundation of the Mughal empire by Babur, India experienced attacks and then consolidation by the rulers who came from the North West. Until the First Battle of Panipat between Babur and Ibrahim Lodhi in 1526 firearms were unknown to India. From Akbar until Aurangzeb the Mughal empire grew into an all India empire. Akbar's important contribution was his policy called Suleh Kul (Peace to All). It tried to integrate the Hindu society in the system of governance.

This was also the period of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. His success is twofold: One, he laid the foundations of the concept of an 'Indian' empire. His struggle was against the 'outsiders' who were ruling India. Two, he was successful in using geographic features of the Deccan to formulate a system of warfare that is called guerrilla warfare. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was successful in lighting the flame in the minds of the Marathas that they were to fight to create an indigenous empire. The Third Battle of Panipat of 1761 proved that the Marathas were fighting for a principle that India was for Indians, governed by Indians. This is because they went all the way to the North West frontier to defend this country.

Can you find out ?

- Find out who fought the Third Battle of Panipat.
- On the map of India locate Panipat.

Another important development during the Maratha rule was the awareness of maritime security. The naval strength developed during Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's period and the role played by



Maratha Ships attacking British Ships



Sarkhel Kanhoji Angre

the Angres along the Konkan coastline was of critical importance. They were able to check the Portuguese, French and the British expansion in this region.

The study of the military history of medieval India teaches us some lessons :

1. The modern system of warfare adopted by the Turkish invaders, the mobility of the cavalry and the use of new technology (firearms) were decisive in battle. The Marathas were able to achieve the mobility by use of cavalry and that made them successful.
2. The inability of the Indian rulers to unite against foreign aggression resulted in the success of the Turkish and Mughal invasions in India.
3. This phase also saw growing awareness about maritime security.
4. Akbar's policy and the policy initiated by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj that came to be followed during the Maratha rule later were of assimilation of cultures. It is this policy that is referred to as Sarva Dharma Samabhava (peaceful coexistence amongst all religions).

Great Military Leaders of Medieval India :

- **Rajaraja the Great** (985-1014) of the Cholas of Thanjavur expanded his small kingdom to include the whole of South India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. His son **Rajendra I Gangaikondachola** (1012-1044) expanded the empire further to reach Ganga. He assumed the title 'Gangaikondachola', the Chola who captured the Ganga. He was the first in the country to launch a successful naval expedition overseas into South-East Asia.
- **Lakshmikarana** (1034-1042) of the Kalachuris of Tripuri campaigned in the area of East Bengal, Orissa, Central India, Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan.
- **Krishnadevaraya** of Vijayanagara (1509-1529) remained undefeated and supreme in the Deccan.
- Amongst the Rajputs, **Rana Sangram Singh** (popularly known as Rana Sanga) and **Maharana Pratap** were both inspiring leaders.
- In case of the Mughals, **Akbar** qualifies as a great general. He established a secure empire from the Hindu Kush to the Deccan.
- In case of the Marathas, **Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** laid the foundation of an indigenous Indian empire. **Santaji** was a brilliant strategist in the area of unconventional warfare. **Sarkhel Kanhoji Angare** proved his military capabilities in terms of maritime security. **Peshwa Bajirao** was able to build on the earlier contribution and establish the Maratha power in the Deccan and the South.

Do you know ?

- **Maratha War Aims :** Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's aim was to create a Hindvi Swaraj that was a Dharma Rajya. The aim was not merely to liberate Maharashtra but to conquer Delhi. The purpose was to create an indigenous empire. For the first 15 years his army was mainly infantry force that could operate in the hilly terrain and conduct guerrilla warfare. Later he realised that a mere defence of forts would not serve the purpose. He then shifted from a purely defensive strategy to an offensive defence with suitable mobile forces. Consequently, cavalry was created. What began with Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was carried forward in the later period. The battle of Panipat is looked at as an attempt by the Peshwas to fight against an external force of Ahmad Shah Abdali to protect India.

Modern Warfare :

In Europe the last decade of the 15th century saw the change from medieval warfare to modern warfare. The army became more professional, more national and better equipped. Guns started to replace battle-axes, bows and arrows. Later, the artillery started to gain more importance and the infantry and cavalry was being integrated with the artillery.

In India, guns were introduced in the 14th century. But they did not bring any change in the method of conducting war. Cavalry continued to be the most important component of the army. It was the battle of the Adyar River (1746) that brought in change in India. The success of the French against the Nawab of Carnatic was because of the use of the use of muskets. Musket trained units of the army were better than a large cavalry. This battle brought modern warfare to India. The Indian powers, Marathas, Nizam and Haider Ali now began to look for Europeans to train their armies.

The main characteristic of modern warfare was the role, equipment, employment and the function of the infantry. Composition and employment of artillery, professionalism and improvement in weapons was crucial. Secondly, guns were standardised. The function of the artillery was to support the troops. The Sindhis were the first to raise the gadi battalions. These were infantry battalions equipped and trained along European lines. The Peshwas, Holkar and Tipu Sultan and later on the Sikhs followed this system.

Military History of Modern India :

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to come to India. Vasco da Gama landed in India in 1498. They were followed later by the British and the French. The Portuguese and the French power declined while the British were able to establish themselves.

The Battle of Plassey (1757) is considered the beginning of the establishment of the British rule in India. After having secured control over Bengal the British turned towards the other regional powers, the Marathas, Nizam and Mysore. After the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799 and the Marathas in 1818 the English were able to annex Sindh in 1842 and defeat the Sikhs and take over Lahore in 1848. After the first Indian war of independence of 1857 the British government took over the control of India from the East India Company. By the late 19th century the British were able to finalise the Afghanistan boundary and in the early 20th century they finalised the boundary between India and China (including Tibet).

What lessons do we learn from the British period ?

1. Frontiers and Boundaries :

Traditional Indian thinking had always used the term frontiers to describe the extent of their empire. For example, when we talk of Akbar's empire we say it extended upto Kabul and Kandahar. Or the Maratha Empire under the Peshwas extended up to Attock. Frontiers describe a general geographic area that lies between two countries. The British brought in the idea of boundaries. Boundary is a specific line that marks the territories of two countries. The McMahon Line, the Durand Line or the Radcliff Line are boundaries.



Durand Line



McMahon Line



Radcliffe Line

Do you know ?

- The **Durand Line** was boundary line between Afghanistan and British India. It was established in 1893 on the basis of an understanding between Foreign Secretary Mr. Mortimer Durand of British India and Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. Today the Durand Line is the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- The **McMahon Line** is a border line between Tibet region of China and North East region of India (Arunachal Pradesh) finalised by British colonial administrator Henry McMahon at the 1914 Shimla Conference.
- The **Radcliffe Line** is the boundary line between the Indian and Pakistan portions of the Punjab and Bengal. It was named after its architect, Sir Cyril Radcliffe who was the joint chairman of the boundary commission.

These are examples of two boundaries :



Barbed wire fence



Border pillar

2. Defensive Orientation : The North Western region continued to remain the key source of threat during the British days. British concerns with China and hence Tibet were the other factor in security thinking that led to consider the Northern region as the clear source of threat. The former had been addressed through the Durand Line, the latter with a position on Tibet as an Autonomous Region that meant suzerainty and not sovereignty of China over Tibet.

3. Marine Security : The British held control over the Indian Ocean, both in terms of the littoral and the two crucial choke points, Suez and Straits of Malacca. Therefore, invasion from the sea was not considered a security threat.

Each country always tries to protect its national interest. National security is one of the most important components of national interest. In this survey of military history we have given the highlights of the three time periods. The purpose is to understand the manner in which approach

to warfare changed over a period of time. There were several changes in the weapon systems, technologies, strategies, etc. In the earlier period we looked at small and big kingdoms and their policies. We also looked at the British Indian policies. Today after independence we look at India's national interest. The past history will help us to understand the military history of independent India.

Please see the following websites for further information :

1. Durand Line Written By : The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Durand-Line>

2. McMahon Line, international boundary, China-India Written By : The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/McMahon-Line>

EXERCISE

Q. 1 (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the following statements.

- i. Cholas were able to spread their empire in _____
 - a. South East Asia
 - b. West Asia
 - c. Afghanistan
 - d. North Asia
- ii. The Battle of Plassey (1757) is considered the beginning of the establishment of the _____
 - a. Maratha rule in India
 - b. British rule in India.
 - c. Mughal rule in India
 - d. French rule in India

Q. 2 State whether the following statements are true or false with reasons.

- i. The First battle of Panipat was fought between Humayun and Ibrahim Lodhi
- ii. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj laid the foundations of the concept of an 'Indian' empire

Q. 3 Explain the correlation between the following.

- i. Nature of weapons systems and method of warfare
- ii. Frontiers and Boundaries

Q. 4 Observe the given map and write about it in brief



Q. 5 Express your opinion on the following.

What is the importance of Akbar's policy of 'Suleh Kul' ?

Q.6. Answer the following.

Why should we study military history ?

Activity :

The McMahon Line was created at the Shimla Conference of 1914. Locate the Line on the map. Find out who participated at this conference and how the McMahon line came to be created.

