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Anthropology of War: Origin, Meaning and Evolution across the South Asian landscape in the Pre-industrial and Industrial era

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Abstract

The socio-cultural evolution of the notion of 'war' has conceptual problems. War has been described as a purposeful group action against another group that seeks to gain material success (abhyudaya) or spiritual progress (nihśreyasa) for one or both. Beginning with conflict over reproductive success among chimpanzees, resource extraction among primitive groups etc., recent ethnic conflicts have been associated with instability of the nation-states. However, war is not just a group action. It depicts conditions of and between societies that are inextricably linked to culture. The present paper seeks to explore the models used for studying war in the past and their limitations while examining whether non-state warfare and contemporary warfare deserve separate approaches. For the analysis of the evolution of war, this paper will look into the evidences of war from 'pre-state' times and modern period in the South Asian context from secondary sources considering the demographics and resource environment of each phase. It also attempts to question the Hobbesian view of 'universality' of war and answer the question as to how far this phenomenon is relevant to the modern world.

Keywords: *war, violence, cultural anthropology, pre-state society, nation-states, conflict.*

'Introduction:

Violence is an overarching term to denote a particular behavioural trend in groups which may be humans or lower animals. Aggressiveness in different species is believed to be an instinct. Malinowski (1941) states that biological determinism labels certain factors like breathing, sleep, rest, excretion and reproduction without whose integral incorporation a civilization cannot survive. However, pugnacity is not one of them. It is determined by cultural sentiments and can often lead to acts of violence and hence, "violence is culturally and not biologically determined". Margearet Mead (1990) has assumed a basic competitive, warring human nature. The *'instinctive theories and comparative Psychology'* take it as a part of man's 'animal heritage' (Hebb and Thompson, 1954).

Conflict is indispensable when more than one individual of a species inhabit a common territory and it takes a turn towards violence when it comes to a point of existential crisis. However, the terms 'war' and 'battle' denote organised violence which presupposes the existence of 'state' or 'state-like' structures.

Jonathan Haas (1990) has classified the causes of war into infrastructural and structural. Infrastructural factors usually concern the ecological factors, mainly the pressure to increase the resource potential of the population. The model based on cultural materialism states that when other means can be used to widen the

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resource base which are less costly than war, then the possibilities of war go down. The structural factors of war have broadly been discussed under kinship, economics and politics. While the superstructure is formed of the ideological basis.

By the beginning of the recorded times, war was already an established pattern of behaviour and in Mesopotamia and Egypt (Ferrill, 1986). Primitive warfare consists of ambushes, feuds and skirmishes. As per the records from Epi-palaeolithic or Neolithic Levant, around 12,000 to 8000 B. C., there was a revolution in weapons technology with the appearance of a number of novel tools. The very tools which at first served to provide the means of food, shelter and clothing evolved later as weapons: the bow, the sling, the dagger and the mace. The bow and the arrow doubled the fifty-yard range of a javelin. The appearance of column and line implied command, organization and the invention of tactics. The execution scene from Spanish Levant shows archers organized into firing line and presumably firing on command. The deployment of troops into column is one of the most significant aspects of organized warfare. Several scenes from the rock shelters in Central India seem to have tribal dances depicted which may have been display of success in hunt or a victory in war (Malaiya, 1992). Even to this day, Boyas, Todas and Gonds practice dancing that reinforces the communal hunting. These dances show chain linking as shown in the paintings. This formation of hands also served as the basis of certain martial drill dances as is evident in the scenes of Zhiri (Raisen) and Zambudwipa (Panchmari).

The ethical stipulation that that war must be fought for the sake of (re-) establishing peace can be traced to Aristotle and Cicero. War must not be undertaken if there are other means to arrive at peace. A war which is not fought for the purpose of ensuring peace at the end cannot be called a just war (Beatrice Heuser, 2010).

Jomini (1937) has classified wars into different categories; the most significant among which are:

i. Offensive wars: to reclaim rights which have been regarded as the most just ear although it would be waged on territory currently occupied by the enemy.
ii. Wars that would be politically defensive i.e., pre-emptive in which one attacked the enemy anticipating an attack from him.
iii. Wars of expediency in which one attacked an enemy to snatch a piece of territory from him in his apparent state of weakness
iv. Wars of intervention in the affairs of neighbouring states
v. Aggressive wars of conquest
vi. Wars of opinion
vii. National wars or wars of resistance against foreign invasions
viii. Civil wars and wars of religion

Many people even in sixteenth century Europe still held on to the God-given notions of war. Modern authors were convinced that war cannot be completely avoided and many were even of the opinion that long periods of peace were detrimental to the interests of the society because they made it weak and the armed forces undisciplined (Guibert, 1772). From early modern period onwards, lawmakers and moral philosophers equated war with 'crime'. Thomas Hobbes is particularly remembered for his views through which he stated that the state of nature is a state of war (Hobbes, 1642). Settlements fortified by stone walls or at least by mud walls, wooden fences or ditches have existed since the Neolithic period.

Since the question of whether industrial societies are inherently pacific

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remains unanswered, it is worthwhile to examine August Comte's theory about their pacific nature where he professed that the opposition between military spirit and industrial spirit was a commonplace in the first half of the last century. The primitive institution had by its very nature a two-fold aim; on one hand, to allow military activity a sufficient growth to accomplish its first mission of social evolution and on the other hand, to establish by the only general means of education, which by invincible pressure could overcome the radical apathy faced by most men at first for the habit of regular work (Aron, 1963). It has been supposed for quite some time that evolution is associated with greater military sophistication in warfare, tactics, weaponry and defensive preparations although there is also substantial variation in the relation between political and military levels (Broach and Galtung, 1966; Otterbein, 1985; Wright, 1965). It has been suggested that more evolved polities make war more frequently, more intensely or more deliberately as policy (Hobhouse *et al*., 1965; Malinowski, 1964; Newcomb, 1960; Summer, 1911; Wright, 1965; Carneiro, 1970, 1978, 1981). The general developments identified with evolution affects the status of the infrastructural sources. The phenomenon of war gradually shakes free of the direct constraints of ecology are loosened as other elements of the infrastructure develop, and production moves away from lithic technology, limited storage capacity and relatively autonomous household production. Increasing productivity supports and in turn depends upon an increasingly elaborate pattern of circulation and controls many of which are far removed from any direct encounter with an environment check.

War and Conflict in the Indian sub-continent:

From the Vedic period, we do have scriptural evidence of battles and conflicts between tribes. However, for the period before that, it is necessary to depend on sources such as rock art and archaeological remains.

Shelter IIIC-43 of Bhimbetka show bands of armour-clad soldiers and cavaliers in stylized forms and bright colours. On the inside wall of the cell are drawings of two horse-riders, two soldiers, one of them fallen on the ground. Near the ceiling, depictions of other cavaliers along with elephant rider is also found (Mathpal, 1984). Shelter IIIA-30 shows a stylized horse on the right bearing a cross-legged rider holding a sword in one hand and reins in the other. In front of the horse is a foot soldier fending off attack from another horse which is rearing on its hind legs almost making the rider slip from its back. The inside wall is used to represent a panoramic view of a battle with images of soldiers confronting each other most likely in the battlefield. Shelter IIIC-33 also represents soldiers with IIIF-21 showing three soldiers, one solitary warrior and another being attacked by the third. The kind of weapons that we come across are battle-axes, swords, bow and arrows, scimitar, shield, spears, dagger, even helmets with heavy horns for protection much like the Spartans. These fall within a time bracket of 8000 B.P. and those of the F phase to around 300 B.C. There must have been recurrent conflicts within the resident tribes because man is capable of representing only what he sees around him.

The art of manufacturing arrowhead from stone was invented during the Neolithic era (Pant). The chalcolithic age witnessed the replacement of stone arrowheads with bronze (an alloy of nine parts copper and one part tin) and copper arrowheads, which were used for both fighting and hunting. In the Indus Valley civilization (2500–1500 B. C. E.), combatants used arrows made of bronze and copper (Barua,

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2005), and double-edged swords and socket-hole axes also appeared. Spoked wheels that transformed transportation emerged in Central Asia between 1700 and 1500 B. C. E. The Indus Valley civilization used carts with solid wheels, and in India spoked wheels came into use around 700 B. C. E. (Habib and Thakur).

The Indus Civilization (3200-2600 B. C. E.) has consistently been described as exceptional in its peaceful egalitarianism (McIntosh, 2002, 2008). However, skeletal traumas seen in the Harappan specimens are consistent with blunt force trauma to the mid-section of the skull, above the ears (Berryman and Symes, 1998). The lesions we described are of five types: (1) injuries to the upper and lower portions of the cranial vault consistent with forceful blows from a long, club-like weapon, (2) circular depression fractures on the frontal squama, near bregma, (3) sharp blunt force trauma to the facial skeleton, (4) broken noses, and (5) lesions suggestive of trepanation. Aside from the last, this pattern of injuries is consistent with interpersonal violence, although nasal fractures can occasionally occur as a result of accidental injury (Walker, 1997).

At the site of Sanauli (2200-1800 B.C.E), Baghpat district, Uttar Pradesh, burial 106 is devoid is any burials. However, it shows the existence of a shield which may have been used to commemorate the warrior. It also shows the existence of a link between the Copper Hoard Cultures and the Harappans with the existence of an antenna sword (Sharma *et al.* 2006).

It can be said without doubt that warfare was a preliminary form of interaction between the prehistoric communities. Warfare could have been associated with the formation of early chiefdoms (Earle, 1997) and state-level societies (Kosse, 1994; Caneiro, 1970). Successful participation in warfare could lead to an upgradation of the material conditions of life, enhance the power and status of the leader (Monks, 1997) with positive impact on integrity, group fitness (Durham, 1976) thereby, serving both individual and collective goals. A certain level of proficiency in warfare may also be necessary as a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1960).

Various prevalent concepts of 'war':

The Vedic era saw the rise of tribal republics and also the city-state like structures in the form of the *Mahajanapadas*. According to *Atharvaveda*, ceremonies and sacrifices like the *Rājasūya*, *Vājapeya* and *Aindramahābhiṣeka* were meant for the glorification of the great conquerors. The Aitareya *Brāhmaṇa* mentions the names kings like *Janamejaya*, *Parikṣita*, *Bharata Dauhṣanti* and many more who went conquering in every direction and performed horse sacrifices. The Hindu sacred texts generally uphold dis-Orderliness (the opposite of *Rta*, Order) as the root cause of evil. This order, expressed in society and in morality, needs to be kept up for the sake of sustainability of the earth, human life, etc. Missing the norms/moral order as set by the sacred texts (like the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Dharmasastras*, the moral treatises), leads the individual and the society into chaos. For instance, the Bhagavad Gita from the Mahabharata Hindu epic upholds the four-fold social class/caste norms (*Chaturvarna*), failing which the society will end up in chaos.

Hence, from the time of the rise of the kingdoms and chiefdoms, warfare changed its character from clan war to class war to a limited degree which was accompanied by the usual causes like wealth, territory and glory.

Buddhism and Jainism both emphasize *ahimsa*, each in its own way. *Ahimsa* is

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connected to sacrifice in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. *Ahimsa* is equated with *tapas* (austerity), *danam* (generosity/gift), *daksina* (sacrificial gifts), truthfulness and integrity (Patton, 2007). In Buddhism and Jainism, ahimsa retains the other qualities presented in the Chandogya Upanishad but is otherwise completely delinked from sacrifice. The ahimsa of Jainism and Buddhism should not be confused with passive non-violence.

History reveals that there had been Jain kings, generals and soldiers who, by duty, had to engage themselves in political wars. And the Jain spiritual masters do not call them heretics just because they had to engage in war and shed blood (Jaina Gazette). Such illustrations such as unavoidable circumstances and duty consciousness allow violence. The Jains concede to certain activities by way of duty (for instance, punishment), etc. Buddhism considers punishment (*danda*) as unattached violence. The crime includes both punishment of criminals and waging a righteous war. One of the major ethical principles of the Jains is Aparigraha, literally meaning non-grabbing. The Jaina teacher *Amitagati* points out that violence is committed for the sake of accumulation of wealth and attachment to possession. Ownership is exercised in the possession of land, house, jewels, money, livestock, servants and other luxury items (Lalwani).

However, the use of *bala* remains the last and the ultimate option. Manu says that initially the policy of *sama*, dana and *bheda* should be pursued. When they fail, the last resort is to declare war. Manu elaborates the normative model for fighting *prakasayuddha*, which is a constituent of *dharmayuddha* (Manu's Code of Law, Olivelle, 2006).

Kamandaka (sixth century C. E.) speaks of the interrelationship between righteous war, people's support and a stable government, long before Carl Von Clausewitz came up with his famous trinity. And Kautilya (third century B. C. E.) is probably the first authority on biological warfare. Again, Kautilya, Manu and Kamandaka wrote about the interconnections between conventional warfare (*vigraha*) and insurgencies (*kopa*).

Warfare has been both existential and instrumental in China, India and the Islamic polities throughout history. Andrew Scobell asserts that China has a dualistic strategic culture. One strand is a Confucian one, which is conflict averse and defensive-minded, and another strand is realpolitik, one that favours military solutions and is offensively oriented. A similar dualistic tradition, as exemplified by *dharmayuddha* (moderate, non-military, defensive-oriented statecraft) and *kutayuddha* (realpolitik in nature and aggressive in orientation) is also present in Hinduism. Surya P. Subedi (2003) notes that the concept of *dharmayuddha* in Hinduism is directed against the evil, whether they are nationals or aliens. In contrast, the proponents of *kutayuddha* focus on overt militarism.

In Jos Gommans's (2007) formulation, the Mughal Empire, like the Ottoman and Manchu empires, was a 'post-nomadic frontier state'. Even in the Turkish period, the structure of the warfare remained the same with the nomadic rulers from central Eurasia, leveraged by the agrarian expansion of the sedentary societies, created powerful cavalry armies with a longer reach, which enjoyed clout in the agrarian societies and raided the borders of the central Eurasian steppe zone in quest of fertile land and wealth.

War in the post-industrial era:

Since the inception of human habitation, the Indian sub-continent has been a hub of

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several forms of crafts and traditions. We have evidence of Indian finesse in textiles with the Mahajanapada of Kashi producing high quality textiles. Even in the Mughal period, we hear of royal *karkhanas* which catered mostly to the royal tastes. However, the term industrial era is used in connection with the Industrial revolution in England. However, the so-called industrial era provided the grounds the conquest, colonization and de-industrialization of India.

The wars fought by the Indians at this time were due to conflict of interests between the indigenous rulers and the British, wars fought by an alliance of Indian rulers and the British against other indigenous rulers, wars fought by the British in India and in the neighbouring countries like Burma, Afghanistan etc. to keep a hold on the colony. This was also a phase when Indian recruits, 'sepoys', were serving the British monarch and aiding him to fight battles against the Axis powers in the World wars. This period is characterized by India functioning as one of the appendages of the colonial war machine.

After 1947, came the phase when India actually adopted an independent foreign policy. C. Raja Mohan (2006), offers a three-tier realist interpretation of Nehru's non-aligned movement. India's treaty-based relations with Nepal and Bhutan were security alliances whereby New Delhi promised to protect these states against external threats and this constituted India's inner circle. In the next concentric circle, which comprised India's extended neighbourhood, New Delhi's policy was determined more by balance-of-power considerations than by ideological ones. India refused to join the non-aligned bandwagon against the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan in the early 1980s. This is because from the 1970s onwards the USSR had been India's steadfast ally. At the global level, the third concentric circle, India's alignment with the Soviet Union was shaped by considerations of national interest. Throughout the Cold War, India determinedly sought to reduce Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. There is nothing, then, in the history of India's non-aligned policy that suggests a fundamental aversion to playing power politics, including alliances. Both Raja Mohan and George K. Tanham (2006) accept the idea that Kautilya's '*mandala*' policy continues to shape India's grand strategy.

The retired Indian Lieutenant-General S. C. Sardeshpande (1993) writes that India's passive defence policy throughout its history is a product of the 'inward looking self-satisfied attitude' of the people. This is due in part to the geographical features of India. High mountains in the north and jungle-filled hills in the east, with sea and ocean along the western and southern borders, has resulted in India being an 'inward-looking geographical entity.' Exhibiting extra-territorial ambitions have not been very common to Indians. This geographical inwardness has been further strengthened by cultural passivity. Sardeshpande (1993) notes: 'Preoccupation with spiritualism, theorizing, complacency and plenitude led Indian militarism away from geographical planes to the peculiar planes of glory, honour, sport and kind of ritual.' The net result throughout history has been a sort of non-lethal warfare which failed to exhibit exterminatory proportions. By and large wars remained far less inhuman as compared to those in European and American continents. However, in spite of this cultural passivity, India continued to face violence from its neighbours which have taken different shapes at times.

The growing gap between Indian and Pakistani economic development, and especially in their respective military capabilities, creates conditions that bode

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ill for stability. These two countries also clash over territory—most dangerously, Kashmir—water, and energy. Terrorism, insurgency, autonomy movements, communal strife, and ethnopolitical violence plague Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, and Sri Lanka. Moreover, clan, tribal, and ethnic influences serve as alternatives to civil society in some parts of the region (especially Afghanistan and along the frontier with Central Asia) and compete with governments for influence and power there.

A retired British general, Rupert Smith, argues that the globalized world is experiencing a new type of war, which he terms the 'war amongst the people'. This phenomenon has been evolving since the end of the Cold War (1989-91) (Kaldor, 1999). Smith writes: 'So instead of a world in which peace is understood to be an absence of war and we move from one to the other in a linear process of peace-crisis-war; we are in a world of permanent confrontations within which nest conflicts, potential and actual, as the various opponents seek to influence each other's intentions.' Rupert Smith continues: 'In fighting amongst the people the ultimate objective is to capture the will of the people.'

The tribal region lies astride the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran frontier and has been the site of episodic ethnonationalist violence. Alleged Balochi nationalist violence has disrupted the state infrastructure for extracting and moving gas from the Sui region of Balochistan.

The Realist School argues that the behaviour of states is shaped by the power at their disposal in the fiercely competitive international environment. Actions undertaken by a polity for defensive purposes may be seen by others as posing an offensive threat (Russett, 2006). The measures that one state takes to increase its security in an insecure world often decrease another state's security, even if that is not intended. Each side fears the other, but every step that one side takes to strengthen security scares the other into similar steps, and vice versa, in a continuing escalating spiral. For the polities, there is no escape from the system. This is known as a 'prisoner's dilemma', fuelled by mutual suspicion. As absolute security is difficult to achieve, constant warfare may be waged, conquests carried afar and power accumulated, all motivated by security concerns – that is, for defence (Gat, 2006). The actors in the international state system pursue gain-maximizing behaviour and have difficulty effecting cooperation. 45 This is because, in the realist paradigm, the international state system is a self-help system friends and allies could become tomorrow's enemies (Russett, 2006). In the brutish world where today's friends may be tomorrow's enemies, states are more concerned with relative gains than with absolute gains (Hui). The standard realist assumption is that states are rational unitary actors calculating, under conditions of uncertainty, the costs and benefits of peace and war (Russett, 2006).

The late twentieth century was characterized by the proliferation of unconventional warfare. The latter term refers to intra-state rather than inter-state war. In recent times, the term 'insurgency' has connoted an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. 46

James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin's (2003) view. They write: 'Insurgency is a technology of military conflict characterized by small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas.' 48 Insurgency includes both guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Insurgency and responses to it

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by the polity concerned (known as counter-insurgency or COIN) together constitute unconventional warfare. A high level of insurgency and COIN in a country create a civil war. In the words of Lakshmi Iyer (2009), in the twentieth century South Asia has been transformed into a violent realm within the clasps of terrorism which is "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents."

There are three major causes of insurgency in India (Iyer, 2009). First, the ongoing liberation movements in states like Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Nagaland. Second, the violence perpetrated by the left-wing groups such as the Naxalites and third, the terrorism that has plagued the Indian cities. A major cause for the first two kinds of insurgencies have mainly been deprivation; particularly landlessness in case of the Naxalites. Hence, the infrastructural factors continue to play an important role in the conflict in the Indian sub-continent till date.

Soft power is a term coined by Joseph Nye (1990a). Understood broadly, soft power includes a state's diplomatic, commercial, and cultural influences and the leverage they provide to help the state achieve its international objectives. Much of soft power is hard to evaluate and not controllable by the government. It reflects the economic activities of the private sector, the influence of ideas, and the pervasiveness of music, film, and other aspects of international culture.

Growing populations and industrial expansion in India and China generate new demands for energy. The Middle East, especially the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and Russia, are all potential suppliers of oil and natural gas. Given the size of the market—India's consumption has doubled in a decade to over two million barrels per day and is expected to increase by four to five percent annually—the stakes involved are huge for potential suppliers.

A second imaginable source of trouble emanating from India might lie in India bidding against China with respect to oil exploration and development in Central Asia. India has no less of a compelling interest in developing Central Asian oil potential than does China. However, in any such race it seems likely that China has considerably more economic horsepower than does India. In such a contest, China's clout is likely to dominate that in India: For example, China has foreign exchange reserves of $610 billion, about four times those of India, FDI in China is more than 10 times that of India, its market for imports is more than five times that of India, etc.

Extra regional sources of conflict:

Growing populations and industrial expansion in India and China generate new demands for energy. The Middle East, especially the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and Russia, are all potential suppliers of oil and natural gas. Pipeline routes are also important.

Though there are full-fledges wars occurring at different parts of the world; the Ukraine War and the Gaza War being the most recent developments, at present what we observe more in South Asia is the rise of shadow warfare or non-kinetic warfare which does not have violent bloodshed or face to face contact. It is more in the lines of an arms race and competition to look for potential resource bases with the ever-rising demands of the rising population. The mainstream conflict between the states have taken this form while the insurgencies continue to supplement the lack of violence confrontation in the first case.

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Conclusion:

Peace has often been defined as a complete absence of violence (Etizioni, 1968). Such a situation would demand an extensive resocialization which might again lead to unimaginable tensions which could only be contained by a totalitarian state. The transition must involve not the elimination but the capsulation of violence. This might require regional bodies to provide intermediary levels for a global consensus formation structure. Conflict is inevitable when a group of people occupy a common space and cross each other's path every day. Hence, conflict cannot be avoided. However, what can definitely be avoided is violence, atrocities and war. The government is the administrator of a country and who govern the government are the intellectuals and the social-thinkers. As most of the under-privileged countries do not have philosophers and social thinkers, consequently, they are self-willed and desperate. At the end of his life, Albert Einstein wrote a book entitled "Out of my Later Years" (1950) where he maintains that consciousness as well as healthy reasoning power are not enough for solving the problems of social life. The question of comparison between the viewpoint of the past and the present status does not arise. Similarly, today's circumstance, today's way of thought will no more be relevant in coming days. Hence, the intellectuals should make the human race conscious regarding the truth, the revolutionary changing process.

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