

Psychological War in Purāṇa Literature

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Abstract

The Purāṇas, influence the present day society in many **aspects** of culture, religion, social practices, geography, and sciences with its **subtle** presence in Indian Literature. They describe the **desired** qualities **as well as** responsibilities of the King (Rājan), the general (Senāpati), the soldiers and the **subjects**. They also describe different activities in battle and its various moral, social and economic aspects of battle. The Purāṇa prohibits fighting only for the sake of fighting, suggesting arms should be taken up only when it may produce benefits and appear only natural and moral. It is reflected that defeating the enemies, the strength of the royal army is no doubt important, but the psychological issues cunningly deployed by the capable strategists also play a significant part.

Key Words: King, Aim, Causes, Attitude, Psychology

Introduction

The Purāṇas occupy a unique position in both sacred and secular Indian Literature. It still has considerable influence over the vast majority of the present day in society. They are of great importance from the points of view of literacy and political history. They throw a flood of light on all aspects of Indian culture, religion, social practices, geography, literature and sciences.

The Purāṇas describe the qualities of the King (Rājan), the nobles, the general

(Senāpati), soldiers and the common folks, i.e. the citizen of a State. The Agni Purāṇa^[1] lists the following as the essential qualities of a King – high lineage, maturity in age, calmness, purity of character, grace, indisputability, truthfulness, foresight, enthusiasm, capacity for quick action, intellect, humility, gratefulness, firm devotion and religiousness. The BṛhaddharmaPurāṇa^[2] says that a king should be Kṣatriya. He should have the authority of Agni, cruelty of Yama, wealth of Kubera and repository of Viṣṇu. The

MārkaṇḍeyaPurāṇa^[3] describes that a king should be like a bee to maintain his treasures, he should expand his area of influence like a peacock and should collect the virtues like a swan, but should exhibit them only on suitable occasions as a cuckoo does. A king must be a strong and steady like iron and should not be puzzled by the sudden appearance of the foe or enemy. He should kill the foe with minimal effort and expense with the skills of a hunter.

According to the Purāṇas, a king should have three main sources of strength: i) authority, ii) enterprise and iii) consultation. The Purāṇas state that the first and foremost duty of a king is to protect his subjects and to make their living simple, easy and peaceful. The Agni Purāṇa^[2] says that there are five usual sources of fear for the subjects – i) unrestrained liberty, ii) stealing (the lack of internal security), iii) state taxes (extortion of wealth through heavy taxation), iv) uncontrolled royal officials and v) the greed of the king himself. It further says that the farmlands, trade-routes, forts, bridges, mines, elephant stables, habitations and the vacant land (non-main's land) are eight main props that act like support pillars (*Astavarga*) –

‘Kṛṣirvaṇīkpathodurgamsetuḥkuñjarabandhanam //

Khanyākaraḥlādānamśūnyānañca
miveśanam /

Aṣṭavargamidamrājāsādhuvṛttonup
ālayet //’^[5].

The king should carefully maintain them. He must protect the state at all times, punish the criminals. He must maintain his own body fit and mind alert. He has to do multitudes of work ‘ajasra karma’ in a day, yet he should daily monitor his resources and arsenal.^[6]

Aims or Causes of war

The Agni Purāṇa^[7] says that the three aims of war are –

- i) Annihilation of the foe
- ii) Plundering the treasure of the foe and
- iii) Troubling the foe.

It further describes that a king should take up arms either when he wants to expand his domain of influence and authority or when he is troubled by the foe. It lists the following conditions when a king should fight the foe -

- i) When the foe attack the armed forces, disturb women, special knowledge and technology,
- ii) When the foe occupy part of the territory,

- iii) When the foe disturb the culture of knowledge and religion,
- iv) When the foe cause troubles to material wealth and obstruct the development of strength,
- v) When the foe insults or injures the friends and followers of the king and/or pollutes the neighbors (maṇḍala) ^[8]

Attitude

The duty of protecting the subject and the state may involve a king in war and may cause his death. The MatsyaPurāṇa^[9] insists that a king should never refrain from fighting, because it is the sacred duty of the Kṣatriyas. The Agni Purāṇa says that enduring the blows and furies of battles is the highest laurel for the Kṣatriyas, they get rid of all their sins through bleeding in the battlefield –

‘Śūrānāmraktamāyātiternapāpaṁtyajantite /

Ghātādiduḥkhasahamraṇeparamaṁ
tapaḥ //’ ^[10]

The world can be enjoyed by those only who come out victorious from the battles and wars. Those who never hold back to fight, achieve the returns of the *AśvamedhaYajña*. Though the

Purāṇaspraise eloquently the act of fighting, they do not encourage war-mongering. According to the Purāṇas, the path of war should be taken as the last resort, only when all efforts to settle the score with foe have failed. They maintain that a king should first negotiate with the foe through *SāmaNīti*, then *DānaNīti*. Failing in their methods, the king should adopt the *BhedaNīti*. i.e. he should try to erode the strength of the foe through dissensions and divisions in the foe’s armed forces.

The Agni Purāṇa^[11] describes the different types of *Sāma*, *Dāna* and *BhedaNīti*. Making dialogues with foe about the mutual relationship dynamics, polite and courteous manners with the foe, making the foe look superior and verbal submission to the foe exclaiming that ‘I am yours’ are the four recognized varieties of *Sāma*. The *Dāna* is of five types –

- i) Giving wealth of all grades,
- ii) Exchange of wealth,
- iii) Presenting some rare articles,
- iv) According approval to the taking away of the wealth already acquired by the foe
- v) Allowing the foe to collect some wealth of his own choice from the state.

The Agni Purāṇa Maintains that dissension among the foe troops may be caused in three ways -

- i) By breaking the ties of affection and attachment,
- ii) By ridiculing the authority of the foe to some of his men,
- iii) By causing mutual distrust.

It further says that the following categories of persons in the foe comp should be utilized to cause dissension in the enemy troops -

- (i) People insulted by the foe king,
- (ii) People discarded by the foe king,
- (iii) People disobliged by the foe king,
- (iv) A respectable person ignored by the foe king,
- (v) People envious of the foe king,
- (vi) Person suffering from fear-psychosis caused by the foe king,
- (vii) Person hostile to the foe king,
- (viii) Person whose property has been confiscated by the foe king,
- (ix) People heavily taxed by the foe king,
- (x) Ambitious people,

(xi) Unscrupulous people,

(xii) Self-styled leader.

The Agni Purāṇa^[12] and the ViṣṇudharmottaraPurāṇa^[13] classify the wars (Daṇḍa) into two types -

- (i) Prakāśa (declared war),
- (ii) Aprakāśa (Undeclared hostilities)

Plundering the enemy territory, destroying the villages of the foe, spoiling the crops and burning the parts of foe kingdom are considered as constituents of *Prakāśa Daṇḍa*. While secretly administering poison, killing important persons of the foe state with the aid of secret or undercover agents, polluting the drinking water of the foe, secret arson, inciting the gentries of the foe state against their king and similar conspiratorial acts constitute the *Aprakāśa Daṇḍa*.

Psychological war

The Purāṇas do not categorize psychological war as a type of war. It appears that the authors of the Purāṇas were sufficiently conversant with the effectiveness and the methods of the psychological war. The Agni Purāṇa^[14] contains some instructions in the above line, but they are scattered in different chapters in a diffused manner. Probably the psychological war is considered by the Purāṇa as a part of *KutaYuddha*, i.e. in the diplomatic level.

The Agni Purāṇa^[15] states that when the king feels that

- (i) concluding a treaty with the foe is of no use,
- (ii) making an alliance with him would mean indulgence only,
- (iii) giving gifts is expected to yield nothing substantial,
- (iv) neither the king nor the foe can cause any harm to each other,
- (v) the king cannot inflict defeat on the foe then the king should take up a posture of ignoring the foe with contemptuous indifference. This would injure the pride and vanity of the foe and would probably demoralize him.

In the same chapter, the Agni Purāṇa further says that smokes, flags and music or reproductions of such sounds should be used to create fear-psychosis in the mind of foe. It is to make a show of much greater strength of own force. Again in this chapter, instructions are there to create plenty of illusions in the foe's camp and to generate panic there. It suggests that a model of a meteor should be constructed and tied at the tail of some bird, then at night after lifting the meteor the bird should be thrown towards the foe camp

with a view to creating the illusion of a meteor-fall. A meteor-fall is considered as a bad omen, so the illusion may demoralize the foe. The Agni Purāṇa further recommends that a king should broadcast some myths to terrorize the foe, the king should make rain of blood (artificial) in the foe territory and should scatter some freshly cut human heads in the foe's palace. All these acts are aimed at causing fear and panic in the people and through the ranks of the foe. This Purāṇa^[16] also recommends that when the foe troops are exhausted, sleepy, or have partly crossed a river or a jungle, the king should raise a fierce rumour stating that the important leaders of the enemy side have just fallen in the battle, others have taken to flight and the king has just reviewed fresh troops from friends and allies. The effective use of this rumour would demoralize the soldiers of lower ranks – who are already physically worn out and they would go scattered in panic. Again, this Purāṇa^[17] recommends that the frightening of the foe troops at night and for this purpose, some people in abnormal and strange outfits should be briskly sent by the different sides of the enemy camp, while some others concealing themselves among some trees and bushes should throw stones, fireballs, incendiaries and other missiles in the enemy camp. Some others should camouflage themselves like

ghosts and make frightening poses near the enemy camp.

The Agni Purāṇa, however, says that negotiations should be made with the virtuous foe only, greedy and lowly enemies should be consoled with gifts, but wars must be fought against the wicked foe. The Purāṇa prohibits fighting only for the sake of fighting – rather it suggests that arms should be taken up only when it may produce benefits, but before resorting to war, one should create a condition when taking up arms would appear only natural and moral.

Conclusion

It may be said that though the Purāṇas make it imperative for the king to remain ever prepared to fight, they urge that a king should exercise utmost restraint and meticulously consider the possible gains and losses before delivering the blow. There has to be utmost sincerity to avoid the war, but if it is imperative, then all measures should be taken to defeat the enemies. With all importance laid on the might of the King himself and his army, the psychological side to inflict fear in the mind of enemies play a major role in this regard.

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