

Beyond the Target: Balancing Skill and Morality in the Light of *Dhanurveda*

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Abstract

Weapons, whether traditional bows or modern firearms, are more than instruments of power, which symbolizes the embody of responsibility, ethics and governance. The text *Dhanurveda*, authored by Maharṣi Vasiṣṭha, was solely dedicated to the art of warfare and elucidates the practical aspects of archery with the ethical frameworks governing the conduct of a warrior. The evidence of this text can be traced throughout the various Indian texts including the *Mahābhārata*, which serves as an ancient manual on warfare, outlining the ethical framework that governs not only the eligibility, nature and potentiality of an archer, but also discusses the conduct of an archer, their training and responsibilities in handling the weapon for a greater good without causing harm to the innocent life. In the beginning *Dhanurveda* declares its agenda as to protect the virtuous people from the evil persons, robbers and thieves, especially it stressed upon the protection of the state and its subjects. Conversely, India's Arms Act 1959, define some strict protocols for firearm ownership, emphasizing safety, honesty and adherence to law. The *Dhanurveda* advocates for strategic skill, precision and mental fortitude in archery while simultaneously stressing the importance of compassion, honour and respect for life and humanity. This study examines the parallel ethical principles between the age-old treasure *Dhanurveda* and the contemporary arms licensing by exploring the timeless relevance of disciplined weapon ownership, advocating for a balanced integration of skill, morality, responsibility and good governance over power, prejudice and oppression.

Keywords: *Dhanurvedyā*, Warfare Ethics, Skills, Practice, Morality, Arms Act 1959

Introduction:

The knowledge of archery or *dhanurvedyā* has a special position in the history of Indian educational system and its societal history. In the ancient time, this skill of martial art not only signifies the physical ability of handling the *dhanu* or bow, but also a medium of learning about focus, discipline, war-ethics and a sense of protecting the society from evils. This vital skill of a warrior has its various traces in most of the ancient Indian texts, but specifically the text *Dhanurveda* is considered as the most authentic source-book with various technical and ethical science of archery.

In the ancient Indian literature, the remarkable war-related characters are often portrayed with a *dhanuṣ* or bow, which not only signifies their heroic power, but also showcase how the warrior handles his respective *dhanuṣ* for the betterment of the kingdom, to safeguard his followers and most importantly to maintain the virtue of the contemporary society without causing harm to the weaker sections. In our ancient Indian tradition, the *Upaveda*, which is closely related with the knowledge of archery i.e., *Dhanurvedyā* is known as *Dhanurveda*, we will discuss about this great treatise in a wider sense throughout this paper. Also, in Sanskrit language the archer, skilled with the theoretical and the practical knowledge of *Dhanurvedyā* is called as *Dhanurdhara*. Here, in this term two words can be shown, one is *Dhanuṣ* which means the bow and another is *dhara* i.e., the one who can hold the bow. Thus, the skilled archer is traditionally known as *Dhanurdhara*.

Commonly, the ancient stories like Rāma from *Rāmāyaṇa*, Arjuna from *Mahābhārata* and Lord Śiva and Paraśurāma, two respective legends from puranic tradition are widely known for their powerful *dhanuṣ* or bows. The *Dhanu* of Rāma is known as *Śārāṅga*, and the *dhanuṣ* of Arjuna, Śiva and Paraśurāma is thus accordingly known as; *Gāṇḍīva*, *Pināka* and *Vijaya*. Even in the gradual development of literary structure, we can find a character like Duṣyanta in the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* of Kālidāsa, where he was once stopped from hunting a deer by Vaikhānasa, a hermit resident by remembering the king about the great virtue of his family and his duty to protect the needy with his art of archery, which cannot be wasted by hunting an innocent hermit deer as,

*na khalu na khalu bāṇaḥ sannipātyo'yamasmi-
nmṛduni mṛgaśarīre puṣparāśāvivāgniḥ/
kva bata hariṇakānām jīvitaṁ cātīlolaṁ
kva ca niśitanipātā vajrasārāḥ śarāste//¹*

Here, after the quick withdrawal of the arrow, the king Duṣyanta was praised by the hermit dweller, which can be observed as the societal principle closely related to the field of *dhanurvedyā* which is obviously influenced by the well-versed practice of *Dhanurveda* that consists not only the skills of applying an arrow, but also suggests some specific norms to regulate its application for the greater wellness.

¹ *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, I.10

These teachings of *Dhanurveda* are not only relevant with the warfare of the ancient time but also some relevance of these teachings of this ancient text are found in the rules and regulations of the issuing and using of firearms which is dictated by the Indian Arms Act 1959. This Arms Act provides strict eligibility criteria for licensing to use any firearms, and tries to make ensure about the lawful conduct of these fire arms as well as public safety. This Arms Act tries to ensure legal conduct but it lacks the ethical education component. Thus, some incidents like the 1997 Jarulbachai village attack (as referenced in *Ashok Debbarma @ Achak Debbarma vs State of Tripura*), happens. This kind of crimes happen because they have no ethical understanding of using the firearms before they have used their firearms. That's where the teachings of the *Dhanurveda* comes in handy.

Thus, this present academic venture argues that teaching of the *Dhanurveda* can be work as a complementary framework to legal instruments like the Indian Arms Act 1959. Also, this paper will study the *Dhanurveda* which is closely related to the ancient Vedic tradition and will try to analyse how this particular text has multi-dimensional impact in the Indian society in different course of time.

Objectives of the paper

Firstly, this paper will analyse the ethical principles emerged from the teachings of the *Dhanurveda*, emphasising on the intersections between skills and warfare ethics which practicing archery. Secondly, this study will explore the ancient techniques which involve

to gather and develop the concentrative knowledge required in archery, along with the ethical norms which will guide the action of an archer beyond his/her technical proficiency. By examining the moral values advocated by the *Dhanurveda*, this paper aims to make a comparison with the rules and values of the Arms act 1959. This approach will provide an in-depth understanding of how ancient ethical wisdom can inspire modern rules and regulations to go in ethical way.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on content analysis of historical texts and establish a parallel discussion in between this historical text and modern rules and regulations about firearms. Data collection will involve gathering primary sources, such as translations of Vasiṣṭha's *Dhanurveda*, and secondary sources, including scholarly articles and books on archery, warfare principles and current articles about Arms Act 1959. The data analysis will utilize thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns within the core skills of the *Dhanurveda* and its parallel comparison with this above-mentioned act.

Warfare Ethics in Ancient Texts:

In the Vedic period there are three kinds of warfare, viz. land warfare, naval warfare and aerial warfare. Wars were generally of two groups, viz. *Dharmayuddha* and *Kūṭayuddha*². *Dharmayuddha* refers to a righteous or war related to justice and ethical practices. It is a

² vide, Dikshitar, V.R.R., *War in Ancient India*. P. 235

concept of warfare that is governed by strict ethical rules and moral principles, ensuring that the war is fought in a fair and honorable manner. During the Vedic period, several key principles were associated with *Dharmayuddha*. A *Dharmayuddha* could only be waged for protecting righteousness, defending one's territory, or upholding justice. Right intention behind the war had to be pure and righteous. The objective should be to restore justice, not to seek personal gain or power. The use of force had to be proportionate to the threat faced. Unnecessary destruction, harm was to be avoided. The war should be limited in scope and should aim at a quick resolution. There were strict rules on who could be targeted and how the war should be conducted. The uses of certain weapons or tactics, such as poison or treachery were also prohibited. The adversaries were expected to treat each other with respect and fairness. Both sides before the commencement of hostilities often agreed upon the rules of war. The treatment of prisoners of war and the conquered population had to be humane. The victor was expected to show magnanimity and avoid unnecessary punishment or humiliation of the defeated. *Dharmayuddha* is a kind of war practice having the principles of *dharma* or righteousness, i.e. the *kṣatradharma*.

Among the various causes of war, the political issue is in the lead which includes various urges like, attaining the imperial status, self-preservation, acquisition of territories, balance of power etc. Any particular ruler or state authority tried to establish the political supremacy over the others and this ambition

leads to warfare. In the fourth chapter of the *Atharvavedasamhitā* gives the idea of overlordship and love of glory³. Thus, when the authority of a state tries to establish the political supremacy over the others, their ambition leads to warfare. The concept of *sārvabhauma* or *cakravartin* is the most powerful political cause of war. *Sārvabhauma* means 'universal sovereign' i.e. ruler of the entire world. The *Atharvaveda* mentioned that, jealousy may be regarded as the psychological factor⁴ of a war. V.R.R Dikshitar states in his book about the psychological background of war in ancient India, "*Being born warriors and barred by rules from taking to other professions, the Kṣatriyas were impatient of peace. In fact, it is the psychological barrenness of peace that led to many wars in India's ancient history*"⁵.

In the Vedic period, the king should confront his enemy in direct, face to face combat. But sometimes, one side had multiple kings while the other had only one⁶. In the Vedic period, only equal should fight with each other as an opposition. That means heroes should confront heroes, men should face men etc. in the battle field. Though the killing or injuring in the battlefield is not regarded as a sin, but the war ethics also indicates that this rule is not applicable for those who have lost their chariots and arms, who has joined their

³ *Atharvaveda*, 4.22

⁴ *ibid.*, 5.8.3

⁵ vide, Dikshitar, V.R.R, *War in Ancient India*. P.11

⁶ *saṁ rājāno aguḥ samṛṇāmyaguḥ saṁ kuṣṭhā aguḥ saṁ kalā aguḥ/*

Samasmāsu yad dusvapnyam nirdviṣate dusvapnyam suvāma//

hand seeking shelter, the messengers and *brāhmanas*. In times of war, warrior should shelter their wives and children in the king's house for their safety. The king who lost his kingdom was brought back and restored to power by a former enemy who became his friend⁷. The *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* also mentions that if a dethroned king seeks refuge with a newly appointed king, the new king should lead him to the northeastern direction, which will help the dethroned king regain his former territory⁸. As a prominent *vedāṅga* literature, the *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra* states that, the king should not fight with those who are in fear, intoxicated, insane or out of their minds, and those who have lost their armor and also not with women, infants, aged men and *brāhmanas*. Above all of these socio-political causes, the war can be negotiated with an effort in order to reduce the rate of destruction in both ways possible. In each and every Indian texts, it is clearly emphasized that war is the last option for any kind of emergency, hence the warriors were trained to focus on the Peace-making. Thus, the skills of weaponry do not allow the warriors to involve any kind of random application of weapons in any kind of personal or social circumstances. In this regard, the topic of our study i.e., *Dhanurveda* mainly focuses on controlling the use of any kind of weapons, especially *Dhanus* by stating the need of societal harmony repeatedly.

The Legacy of *Dhanurveda*: A Historical Context

In the ancient time the Education in India was given in the hermitage of Gurus where, the students are supposed to go through various multi-dimensional aspects of education including *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Purāṇas*, *Vedāṅgas*, military techniques and warfare practices, ethical and value-added lessons, archery, *Āyurveda* etc. In the Vedic period, the origin of the *Dhanurveda* can be traced. The *Ṛgveda* contains several hymns describing the importance of archery and combat skills. During this time, warfare was not only signified as a physical combat, but also it involves some spiritual and ethical directions. In different stages of Indian society, the knowledge of archery has played an important role in shaping the skills and morality of the warriors, which not only prepare the archer to combat in the warlike situation, but also helps to navigate their concentration and the morality of handling their *Dhanuṣ* in order to protect the society from the evil powers. In the sixteenth chapter (*ṣoḍaśādhyāya*) of *Yajurveda*, while praising the various incarnation of Rudra, there can be found the term *Dhanuṣ* in several verses. In this chapter, the application of the celestial *Dhanuṣ* is regarded as the means to defeat the enemies and must be used only for the betterment and safeguard of the society⁹. Here, the priest offered their prayers to *Varuṇa*¹⁰ and wish for a war-free society where

⁷ *Atharvaveda*.,3.3.5

⁸ *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*.,8.2.6

⁹ *yāmiṣu giriśanta haste bibharṣyastave/*

śivām giritrā tām kuru mā himsīḥ puruṣām jagat//
Yajurveda, XVI.4

¹⁰ *vijyam dhanuḥ kapardino viśalyo bāṇavn uta/*
aneśannasya yā'īṣava'ābhurasya niṣaṅgadhiḥ//

the bow and arrows should only be used to lessen the obstacles that prevails in this universe.

The evidence of *Dhanurveda* can be traced in several Indian literatures. In the sixth chapter of the third book of *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the *Dhanurveda* is referred as one of the eighteen significant branches of knowledge taught by Ācārya Bhṛgu¹¹. Another text which cited the existence of *Dhanurveda* is the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*. According to this Purāṇa, the God Śatakratu (Indra) represents the *Dhanurveda* or the knowledge of warfare¹². In the *Agnipurāṇa* also the importance of *Dhanurvedyā* can be found.

The Epic *Mahābhārata* provides valuable insights regarding the principles and strategies of warfare including the importances of righteousness, ethical practices and protection of the weaker section of the society. The *Mahābhārata* mentions the *Dhanurveda* as a *sūtragrantha*¹³. Here in the *Sabhāparva*, Maharṣi Nārada asks the *Yudhisthira* about his familiarity with the treatises on archery i.e., *dhanurveda*, military strategy i.e.,

yantrasūtram and urban planning i.e., *nāgaram*. In the *Bhīṣmaparva* of *Mahābhārata*, the term *Dhanurdhara* or archer was found excessively, especially when Bhīṣma was in his bed of arrows i.e., *śaraśayyā*, he praised the archery striking skill of Arjuna in the battle field of Kurukṣetra as follows:

*kṛntanti mama gātrāṇi māghamāse gavāmiva/
arjunasya ime vāṇāḥ neme vāṇāḥ
śikhaṇḍīnaḥ*//¹⁴

Which means, “they pierced my limbs like cows in the month of māgha. These are Arjuna’s arrow strikes, not Śikhaṇḍī’s”. Here, *Pitāmaha-Bhīṣma*, the opposition of Pāṇḍavas, though carried the deepen wounds caused by the sharp strikes of Arjuna’s arrows, still praised his opposite warrior Arjuna who have the best archery skill ever.

From the above discussion it is clear that the knowledge of *Dhanurvedyā* and its source book i.e., *Dhanurveda* was widely spread in the various phases of Indian society.

The Traditional flow of *Dhanurveda*:

In the Vedic era of ancient India, every traditional knowledge system flows from the revered teacher to their students throughout various ways like conversation i.e., *kathopakathana*, practical knowledge i.e., *yoga*, group activities i.e., *sāmūhikakriyā*, experience i.e., *abhijñātā* etc. The four Vedas are the store-house of Indian Knowledge System consisting of various knowledge like, mathematics, astrology, environmental

yā te hetimīdhuṣṭam haste babhūva te dhanuḥ/
tayāsmānviśvatastvamayakṣmayā pari bhuja// ibid.,
XVI.10-11

¹¹ aṅgāni vedāscatvāro mīmāṃsā nyāyavistarāḥ/
purāṇaṁ dharmasāstraṁ ca vidyā hyetaścaturdaśa//
āyurvedo dhanurvedo gāndharvaścaiva te tayāḥ/
arthasāstraṁ caturthaṁ tu vidyā hyaṣṭādaśaiva tāḥ//
Viṣṇupurāṇa, III.VI.28

¹² dharmasā dharmasāstrāṇi purāṇaṁ ca tathā manuḥ/
itihāsaṁ prajādhyaśo dhanurvedaṁ śatakratuḥ//
Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa (*Pratimālakṣaṇa*), III.73. 46

¹³ kaścidabhyasate śaśvadgrhe te bharatarābha/
dhanurvedasya sūtraṁ ca yantrasūtraṁ ca nāgaram//
Mahābhārata, II.V.110

¹⁴ *Mahābhārata*, *Bhīṣmaparva*, 114.6

directions, geography, religious activities, moral teachings, skills and techniques of daily life etc. The four Vedas are respectively: *Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*. Each Vedas have their respective *Vedāṅgas* and *Upavedas*. The *Dhanurveda* is considered as the *Upaveda* of the *Yajurveda*.

In the very beginning of the *Dhanurveda* text, there is an elaboration how the traditional knowledge of *Dhanurvedyā* came into existence and popularised later. Once sage Viśvāmitra requested the revered guru Vaśiṣṭha to elaborate the knowledge of *Dhanurveda* in order to safeguard the society from the evil power. Vaśiṣṭha deliberated his noble thoughts and in the beginning, he stated how and when this proficiency of archery actually comes from. According to Vaśiṣṭha, the propounder or *pravartaka* of *Dhanurveda* was Lord Śiva. Throughout the times, his student Paraśurāma got his treasured knowledge of archery under the tradition of pupils i.e., *śiṣya-paramparā*¹⁵. Thus, in due course of time, this wave of knowledge enriched several great archers i.e., *Dhanurdharas* namely, Bhagavān Rāmachandra, his beloved brother Lakṣmaṇa from the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, and also the famous guru Droṇācārya, the middle *Pāṇḍava* i.e., Arjuna from another great epic *Mahābhārata*. Here, the sage Vaśiṣṭha mentioned that the *Dhanurveda* is also famous as a *saṁhitā* or collection of both *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* and we should preserve this

noble tradition before starting his noble teachings.

The Subject Matter of *Dhanurveda*:

The art of *Dhanurveda*, which is portrayed in the texts of *Dhanurveda* clearly emphasised the importances of a *Dhanurdhara* for the society. In the *Dhanurveda*, an archer was not only considered as a random warrior only compatible in the battle-field, but also considered as the great protector of the respective society as:

eko'pi yatra nagare prasiddhaḥ
syāddhanurdharaḥ/

tato yantyarayo dūrāt mṛgāḥ
simhaghādeva//¹⁶

Which means, the *ari* or enemies keep away from the city, which is protected by a single mighty archer, like the deer/animals of a forest keep away from the lion's den out of fear. The text has several parts and parcels which carries the essence of multidisciplinary skills needed to develop the cognitive and psychomotor development of an archer.

The core subject matter of this ancient Indian text *Dhanurveda* is- the science of archery. In this collection, the knowledge of archery, including the application of weapons and also the strategies of warfare are described systematically. Similar to other Indian texts, the presentation of the text is straightforward containing of both analytical and lyrical

¹⁵ *Dhanurveda*, I.6

¹⁵ bruhi Bhagavan! dhanurvedyām śrutriyāya dṛhacetase
śiṣyāya duṣṭasatruvināśāya ca/ *Dhanurveda*, I

¹⁶ śṛṇo bho rājan viśāmitra! yām sarahasyadhanurvedyām
bhagavān sadāśivaḥ paraśurāmāyovāca tāmeva
sarahasyām vacmi te hitāya/ ibid.

composition. Once the ambitious sage Viśvāmitra approached his guru Vaśiṣṭha, bowed him with respect and uttered, “Tell me, O’ venerable one, the science of archery for a disciple with a firm mind”¹⁷. Accepting his request, sage Vaśiṣṭha replied to Viśvāmitra, “Listen, O’ King Viśvāmitra! In ancient time, the eternal Śiva imparted the secrets of archery to Paraśurāma and I will now convey that entire knowledge as same as same as the traditional one. You listen”¹⁸.

Thereafter, the main text begins throughout the textual portion. Basically, the text has four *pādas* or parts, they are as follows:

- i. *Dhanurvedyāyāḥ Dīkṣābidhi* i.e., instruction on the principles of archery
- ii. *Samgrahaḥ/ Abhyāsabidhi* i.e., rules for collecting the weapons and practicing them
- iii. *Siddhaprayogāḥ/ Prakṣepaṇabidhiḥ* i.e., ways of casting the bows
- iv. *Prayogabidhiḥ* i.e., the rules for application of the weapons

There are various kinds of weapons used in the battlefield by the warriors. Before going to the in-depth knowledge of archery skills, the *Dhanurveda* mentioned seven ways of combating the oppositions in a war. They are respectively,

- i. *Dhanuryuddha* i.e., by using Arrow
- ii. *Cakraṁ* i.e., by using Discuss
- iii. *Kuntaṁ* i.e., by using Spear
- iv. *Khaḍgaṁ* i.e., by using Falchion
- v. *Churikā* i.e., by using Dagger
- vi. *Gadā* i.e., by using Mace
- vii. *Bāhuyuddha* i.e., by wrestling

But, while categorising the knowledge tradition according to the four castes that prevailed strongly at that point of time, it was advised here in this text that the *Brāhmanas* should be trained in archery¹⁹. This text not only emphasised the pedagogical angle of a learner, but also greatly mentioned the qualities one should have to become a teacher of this secret of archery. The one who knows the seven ways of fighting which are mentioned above, is entitled to teach the art of warfare and is eligible to become the *ācārya*. He who knows any four ways of fighting among them, is called as *Bhārgava*. Lastly, he who knows types of *yuddha* is known as *Yoddhā* and the *Gaṇaka* is the one, who knows only one type on fighting among the seven which are mentioned above.

Also, this text suggested the proper time, place and ways of practicing the techniques of archery and how to gain the mastery in it with different skills. These skills include the knowledge of Aims, which is very much important not only in the accurate time of applying the archery skill, but the different

¹⁸ brāhmanāya dhanurddeyam/ ibid. I.8

kinds of aims are similarly important for an archer in their time of practice. The four different kinds of aims or *lakṣya* which are mentioned in the later part of its first chapter i.e., in *Dīkṣābidhi*²⁰. They are respectively as follows:

- i. *Sthiram lakṣyam*, where both the aim and the archer stand steady in their respective positions.
- ii. *Calam lakṣyam*, where the Aim is a moving object and the archer from his/her steady position tries to strike the aim by his arrow.
- iii. *Calācalam lakṣyam*, where the aim remains steady but the archer has to keep moving and try to strike the aim at the same time.
- iv. *Dvyayacalam lakṣyam*, where both the aim and the archer are in a moving condition and the archer tries to shoot the aim, this is considered as the toughest aim shooting technique of the archery science.

With the indication of the objects which are perfect for engaging the archer in their practice, the *Dhanurveda* also

indicated the allotted time of a day which are perfect for practicing archery accordingly with the changing dimension of the sun rays and the shadow in its second chapter i.e., *lakṣyabidhiḥ*. The archer is advised to practice by placing his aim in the west in the forenoon and also to place the aim in the east in the afternoon²¹. It is typical that in this *Upaveda*, the archer was advised to practice the archery by using his left hand to strike the arrows and after mastering in this, he can practice the same with his right hand²². This knowledge clearly influenced the great *Dhanurdhara* of the *Mahābhārata* where we can find the Sanskrit term *Savyasācī* which denote the typical skill of Arjuna, who can easily apply his archery skill by both of his hands.

Besides these, the text also consists of several topics related to the *Dhanurvedyā* and also some multidisciplinary knowledge like, the influences of medicine, astrology, Yogic science, ethical norms which are important for an archer to develop his/her overall development as a responsible and capable human being of the society. The parallel topics which are closely related to the science of archery and well explained in the text of *Dhanurveda* are: the qualities of an archery student, the principles of transferring the science of archery, the techniques of striking an aim, the favourable bows and the avoidable bows, the warfare principles, the ethical norms

²⁰ lakṣyam caturbidham jñeyam sthiram caiva calantathā/
calācalam dvayacalam vedhanīyam krameṇa tu//
ātmānam susthiram kṛtvā lakṣyañcaiva sthiram budhaḥ/
vedhayet triprakarantu sthiravedhī ca ucyate//
calantu vedhayed astu ātmasthāneṣu saṁsthitāḥ/
calam lakṣyam tu tat proktamācāryeṇa śivena vai//
dhanvītaḥ calate yatra sthiraalakṣye samāhitaḥ/
calācalam bhaettatra hyaprameyamacintitaḥ//
ubhāvapi calau yatra lakṣyam cāpi dhanurdharaḥ/
tadvijñeyam dvayacalam śrameṇa bahu sādhyate//
Dhanurveda, I.96-99

²¹ udite bhāskare lakṣyam paścimāyām niveśayet/
aparāhne ca kartavyam lakṣyam pūrvadigāśritam//
ibid., II.4

²² vāmenaiva śramam kuryāt susiddhirdakṣiṇāmārabhet/
ibid., II.3

of an archer as a warrior, the person which should not be killed in the battle fields etc.

Skills throughout the Chapters of *Dhanurveda*:

The *Dhanurveda* not only skilled the warriors in the science related to war and archery, but also trained them the ground level techniques which are involved in making the bow, arrow and string etc. These techniques involve like, from which kind of wood and metal a bow should be designed so that it will perform accordingly to the needs of a war, so that in the time of emergency in the mid-war the archer doesn't have to wait for a skilled person. This diverse knowledge from selecting the perfect wood for making a bow to applying the bow with proper scientific techniques this text left no stone untried to make the warrior a one-man-army, which double-up the power of their team in comparison to their enemies.

Dhanurveda theoretically analysed the preparatory stage of applying the *Dhanuṣ* which can be learned by several practices under a learned Guru of this specific field. The archer should first place the arrow on the bowstring and fasten the loop. Then, after taking position, he should place his hand on the arrow. The bow should be held with the left hand. After that, he should aim his targeted object. Then he should bow to Śiva, then to the Guru, the Vighnarāja, the bow and the arrows. When the Guru is present in this process, his permission should be sought by the archer. Then, the archer should perform the *prāṇāyama*, retain it firmly by *kumbhaka* and exhale his breath by creating the sound *hum*²³.

²³ *prāṇavāyurṁ prayatnena prāṇena saha pūrayet/*

Thus, by creating the balance between the breath and body, the archer should step forward and strike his arrow to accomplish his tasks.

In some cases, various difficulties arise while striking the objects without prior practices. Here in such situation, the *Dhanurveda* advises that, after achieving proficiency in hitting ordinary targets, the archer should practice hitting targets made of iron (*lauha*), leather (*carma*), clay lumps (*mṛtpiṇḍa*) and pots (*ghaṭa*). The text also suggested that as per astrology, *hasta*, *punarvasu*, *puṣya*, *rohini* etc. are some of the auspicious times for practicing the archery. Thus, Sunday, Friday and Thursday are auspicious days for initiating actions related to weaponry like archery²⁴. The text also suggested some favourable environment which clearly give a sign of victory for the respective archer in the battlefield²⁵. The state in which the victory belongs to the warrior is likely where, winds blow from behind, the sun and birds are at the back and clouds float above is significantly considered as the most favourable one. Also, by the *Dhanurveda* also suggested some medicinal practices influenced by the *Āyurveda*, by which the archer can prepare some poisonous arrow to strike the enemy and simultaneously safeguard themselves from the sharpen weapons, from the attacks of the wild

kumbhakena sthiram kṛtvā humkāreṇa visarjayet//
ibid. 21

²⁴ *ravivārah śukravāro guruvārastathaiva ca/*
etadvāram trayam dhanyam prārambhe
śāstrakarmaṇām// ibid. 13

²⁵ *prṣṭhena vāyavo vānti prṣṭhe bhānuvayāmsi ca/*
anuplavante meghāśca yasya tasya raṇe jayaḥ// ibid.
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animals and even from *Brahmāśtra* while needed.

Ethics Reflected in the *Dhanurveda*:

The *Dhanurveda* is basically a book of military science. It discusses the warfare principles from the perspective of an archer. Firstly, it suggested that cowardly person should not be appointed as the *senāpati* or commander as a single coward can break the morale of the large army, causing the heart lose even to the bravest warriors²⁶. It is advised not to kill some specific warriors by the archer in the battle field in any circumstances. The specific categories of warriors which must be forbidden are: one who is unconscious, disabled, has lost their weapon, withdraw his fighting, one who is fleeing and lastly who surrendered. Also, a strong warrior should not attack a coward and even a fleeing one²⁷. One should not kill someone who is asleep, inattentive, insane, frightened, unarmed, an infant, a woman, someone pleading, or someone running away.

The *Dhanurveda* also helps to drive the mantel energy of an archer by stating that, it is unrighteous for a warrior to die of disease at home, when he dies in battle, that is his eternal duty. This text not only trained the archer about his rights and needed skills, but also his duty and ethical norms for not only for his society, but also for the sake of greater

human life including the weaker section of their opposition.

Arjuna and Aśvatthāmā: Two Faces of the *Dhanurveda* Ethics in the *Mahābhārata*:

The *Mahābhārata* is the greatest screenplay of the world. It is the embodiment of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. In the broad area of *dharma*, the *Mahābhārata* covers the teachings of moral ethics where the ethics of warfare stands out through two characters of the *Mahābhārata*; Arjuna and Aśvatthāmā. These two characters make a contrast with each other about martial law and ethics and also it provides deep insights about how the ethics of the *Dhanurveda* is followed and violated. Among them Arjuna; the third Pāṇḍava is the embodiment of martial *dharma*. He is a disciplined archer. Through his life one can undoubtedly say that Arjuna gains his mastery over the teachings of the *Dhanurveda*. From the lifespan of Arjuna, we can see that Arjuna always follows one specific rule of the *Dhanurveda* that he never attacks the unconscious and disabled one, even the one who has lost his weapon, and the one who withdraw his fighting and the one who surrendered before him. Even before starting the war of Kurukṣetra, he tells Kṛṣṇa that he will see the warriors of this war and only engage with those warriors who are capable of fighting with Arjuna.²⁸ By this decision he respects the teachings of the *Dhanurveda*. Again, He bore compassions in this character also. Thus, we can see the dilemma in his mind

²⁶ ekah kāpuruṣo dīrṇo dārayet mahatīm camarī/
taddīrṇamanudīryante yudhāḥ śuratamā api//
ato vai kātaram rājā bale naiva niyojayet//

²⁷ mūrchitam na vikalam nāśastram nānyayodhinam/
palāyamānam śaraṇam gatañcaiva na himsayet//
bhīruḥ palāyamāno'pi nanveṣṭavyo balīyasā// *ibid.*, 42

²⁸ kairmayā saha yodhavyamasmin raṇasamudyame//
Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, 1.22

before starting the Kurukṣetra war and he seeks clarity from Lord Kṛṣṇa. He tells Kṛṣṇa that he does not see any good killing his kinsmen in the battle of Kurukṣetra.²⁹ Then Kṛṣṇa enlightens him with the duties of a Kṣatriya and he says that for a Kṣatriya there is nothing more welcome than a righteous war.³⁰ Here, also we can see the word *righteous war* reflects the perspectives of both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna about the war of Kurukṣetra which is going to be a righteous war to establish *dharma*. Arjuna never let his emotions dictate his conduct in the battlefield which can be seen through his promise of kill Jayadratha in a rightful manner after Jayadratha with the Kauravas has killed his son Abhimanyu. He kills Jayadratha in the battlefield only never tries to strike him when Jayadratha is in vulnerable moment. This shows his ethics as a warrior as well as a warrior. But, in stark contrast, in the *Mahābhārata* the character Aśvatthāmā represents as a Brāhmaṇa who is also a warrior but runs through his emotions; especially anger and grief. After witnessing the deaths of his father Droṇācārya and his friend Duryodhana, he does something which is the exact opposite of teachings of the *Dhanurveda*. He launches a night raid on the camp of the Pāṇḍavas and kills the unarmed sons of Draupadī and even throws his Brahmāstra at the womb of Uttarā with the intention to kill the unborn son of Abhimanyu. These two acts of Aśvatthāmā represents a complete collapse of martial

ethics and his own duties as a Brāhmaṇa. As Irawati Karve states Aśvatthāmā rejects his duty as a Brāhmaṇa and thus he fails to become a Kṣatriya.³¹ After his heinous crimes Kṛṣṇa intervenes with a curse of immortality which bounds Aśvatthāmā to carry his wound until the end of the last epoch³². Despite of his skills Aśvatthāmā turns into a destroyer of *dharma* than a warrior because he leads by his emotions and ignores the ethics of a war. Thus, the history now remembers Arjuna as a skilled warrior who upholds his duty as a Kṣatriya. Even folklore, art, literature portray him as symbol of a balanced warrior who one can follow when they face some moral dilemma in their paths of duty. In contrast, Aśvatthāmā is remembered as a cursed warrior who did not follow his own *dharma*. His tale from the *Mahābhārata* serves as a moral warning that without the knowledge of ethics even knowledge and power can turn into a destructive weapon for ourselves as well as for the society. Even, at present, in various folklores people believe that Aśvatthāmā is still roaming around in earth with his wound as a consequence of forsaking his *dharma*.

Ethical Parallel: The *Dhanurveda* and Indian Arms Act 1959:

Weapons, whether traditional bows or modern firearms, are more than instruments of power, which symbolizes the embody of responsibility,

²⁹ na ca śreyo'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanamāhave// *Ibid.*, 1.31

³⁰ dharmyārdhi yudhācchreyo'nyatkṣatriyasya na vidyate// *Ibid.*, 2.31

³¹ Irawati Karve, 'Paradharmo Bhayavahah' in *Yugānta the end of an epoch*, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2021, p.137

³² *Mahābhārata*, Soutikaparvan, 16.9-12

ethics and governance. The text *Dhanurveda*, authored by Maharshi Vasiṣṭha, was solely dedicated to the art of warfare and elucidates the practical aspects of archery with the ethical frameworks governing the conduct of a warrior. Similarly, India's Arms Act, 1959, lays down legal protocols for the possession and use of modern firearms, focusing on safety, responsibility, and lawful conduct. The *Dhanurveda* was composed to train the warriors and made them ethically ready to carry their weapons. The main object of their right to carry a weapon is to protect the civilians from any kind of harm. Parallely, in the Arms Act 1959 we can see this similarity with the concept of the *Dhanurveda*. Basically, the Arms act 1959 is enacted to regulate the use of firearms in democratic India with a view on public safety and legal oversight. According to the Arms Act 1959 no human can carry a weapon until or unless they have provided a licence in accordance with the provisions of this act and this act quotes as *"provided that a person may, without himself holding a license, carry any firearm or ammunition in the presence, or under written authority, of the holder of the licence for repair or for renewal of the licence or for any use by such holder."*³³ Also, the Arms Act 1959 clearly mentions that the licence for the specific arm is given to a person who is the citizen of India and that person can bore a gun which is not less than twenty inches in length and that gun will be used for protection or sport or for bona fide crop protection.³⁴ On the other hand the

licence can be refused by the authority if the person is proved to be unsound.³⁵ This is the eligibility criteria according to the Arms Act 1959 of a person for using a firearm. But there is a loophole in the Arms Act 1959 regarding the misuses and the punishments for misuses where the teachings of the *Dhanurveda* seems to be important. Arms Act 1959 made a provision for arrest of a person conveying any arms whether it is covered by license or not for any unlawful activity may arrest that person without any warrant and may seize the weapon from him.³⁶ In the Arms Act 1959 punishments are also included for some of the actions relating to the arms. As for example, Arms Act 1959 quotes *"whoever uses any prohibited arms or prohibited ammunition or does any act in contravention of section 7 (prohibition of acquisition or possession, or of manufacture or sale of prohibited arms or prohibited ammunition) and such use or act results in the death of any other person, shall be punishable with imprisonment for life, or death and shall also be liable to fine."* The example of this punishment can be seen through the case *"Ashok Debbarma @ Achak Debbarma vs State of Tripura on 4 March, 2014"*. This case concerned with a tragic incident in which a group of Armed Extremists at Jarulbachai village in the night of 11.2.1997, set fire to twenty houses belonging to a group of linguistic minority community of Bengal settlers, in which 15 persons lost their lives, which included women and children and causing extensive damage to their properties.

³³ Arms Act, 1959, Chapter II, Section 3.

³⁴ Arms Act, 1959, Chapter III, Section 13 (3) (a) (i)

³⁵ Arms Act, 1959, Chapter III, Section 14 (b) (i) (2)

³⁶ Arms Act, 1959, Chapter IV, Section 20.

In this case the appellant Achak Debbarma is sentenced to death on his conviction under Sections 148/149/302/326/307/436 IPC read with Section 27(3) of the Arms Act, 1959.³⁷ This kind of horrific incident is happened because there are no ethical teachings behind the possession of arms. This ethical loophole can be fixed by the teachings of the *Dhanurveda*. The *Dhanurveda* teaches us about the eligibility criteria of the arm holder which should still be focused before handing over any weapons. Thus, in educational institute there should be readings about the ethics of the *Dhanurveda* so one can be ethical towards the using of the weapons.

Conclusion

Though the discussion of *Dhanurveda* cannot be summarised in such a short research paper, but this study opens up our mind that how this noble tradition of knowledge helped our past heroes in shaping our country as one of the strongest one. But, in due course of time the modern education system needs this ancient *Upaveda* again to enrich the new scholars, the sportsmen and also the revered historians to analyse the importances of this text according to their respective fields. Now-a-days it is very popular in the news headlines that weapons are used in short term anger issues even in some ordinary arguments in spite of the strict arm-license regulation which can be seen from the above arguments about the Jarulbachai massacre. Thus, this categorical and systematic text suggests that in normal action, a wise person should not use weapons:

sāmānye karmaṇi prājño naivāstrāṇi prayojayet/

This opinion of the *Dhanurveda* teaches us to control the impulsive weaponry activities. Presently, in many of our sports institution trained the archer with the practical knowledge of archery, but the systematic theoretical knowledge can add the values needed to not only be a good archer but also to be a focussed student and the future responsible citizen of our country. Thus, this text can still guide us if we are able to use it properly.

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³⁷ *Ashok Debbarma @ Achak Debbarma vs State of Tripura on 4 March, 2014*, p.1-3

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