

Dhanurveda

The Dhanurveda (धनुर्वेद) is a Sanskrit treatise on warfare and archery, traditionally considered an Upaveda appended to the Yajurveda (1100–800 BCE) and attributed to either Bhrigu or Vishvamitra or Bharadwaja. It is one of the four upavedas of the Vedas (along with Ayurveda, Gandharvaveda and Sthāpatyaveda)

Hanurveda, part of the Vedas (1700 BC – 1100 BC), contains references to martial arts. Charanavyuha, authored by Shaunaka, mentions four upavedas (applied vedas). These include archery (dhanurveda) and military sciences (shastrashastra), the mastery of which was the duty (dharma) of the warrior class. Kings usually belonged to the kshatriya (warrior) class and thus served as army commanders. They usually practiced archery, wrestling, boxing and fencing as part of their education.

The Vedic hymns in the Rigveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda emphasize the use of the bow and arrow. The second Veda, the Yajurveda, contains the Dhanurveda (dhanus "bow" and veda "knowledge"), which was an ancient treatise on the science of archery and its use in war. Several works of ancient literature refer to Dhanurveda. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa refers to it as one of the eighteen branches of knowledge, and the Mahābhārata states that it has sutras like other Vedas. Śukranīti describes it as "upaveda yajurveda" which has five arts or practical aspects.

The Indian subcontinent is home to various fighting styles.

Sanskrit terms for "martial arts" include dhanurveda (from dhanus "bow" and veda "knowledge", literally "science of archery" in Puranic literature, later applied to martial arts in general) śāstravidyā (from vidyā "learning, knowledge" and śāstra " sword, weapon"), literally "sword knowledge". The text of the Vishnu Purana describes the Dhanurveda as one of the traditional eighteen branches of "applied knowledge" or Upaveda. The historical form of wrestling is called mallayuddha in the north and malyutham in the south.

History

In contemporary India, the main martial arts styles practiced are Kalaripayattu in Kerala, South India (an umbrella term for various armed and unarmed styles) and Pehlwani wrestling in North India. Notable regional styles include thang-ta from Manipur and gatka from the Punjab region.

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The Dhanurveda describes the practices and uses of archery, the making of bows and arrows, military training, and rules of engagement. The treatise discusses martial arts in relation to the training of warriors, charioteers, cavalry, elephant warriors, infantry, etc. It was considered a sin to shoot a warrior in the back and fight multiple warriors at once. The bow used in the Vedic period was called danush and was described in detail in the Vedas. The curved shape of the bow is called vakra in the Artha Veda. The bowstring was called a jya and was only stretched when needed. The arrow was called iṣu and the quiver was called iṣudhi.

Many popular sports mentioned in the Vedas and epics have their origins in military training, such as boxing (musti-yuddha), wrestling (maladwandwa), chariot racing (rathachalan), horse riding (aswa-rohana) and archery. (dhanurvedya).

Other scattered references to martial arts in medieval texts include Kamandakiya Nitisara (ca. 8th century ed. Manmatha Nath Dutt, 1896), Somadeva Suri's Nitivakyamrta (10th century), Bhoja's Yuktikalpatara (11th century) and Somesvara's Manasollasa III (12th century).

Agni Purana

One of the earliest extant manuals of Indian martial arts is in the *Agni Purana* (dated to between the 8th and the 11th century). The *Dhanurveda* section of the *Agni Purana* spans chapters 248–251, categorizing weapons into thrown and unthrown classes and further dividing them into sub-classes. It catalogues training into five major divisions for different types of warriors: charioteers, elephant-riders, horsemen, infantry, and wrestlers.

The work describes nine asanas (stances) for fighting:

- *samapada* ("holding the feet even"): standing in closed ranks with the feet put together (248.9)
- *vaiśākha*: standing erect with the feet apart (248.10)
- *maṇḍala* ("disk"): standing with the knees apart, arranged in the shape of a flock of geese (248.11)
- *ālīḍha* ("licked, polished"): bending the right knee with the left foot pulled back (248.12)
- *pratyalīḍha*: bending the left knee with the right foot pulled back (248.13)
- *jāta* ("origin"): placing the right foot straight with the left foot perpendicular, the ankles being five fingers apart (248.14)
- *daṇḍāyata* ("extended staff"): keeping the right knee bent with the left leg straight, or vice versa; called *vikaṭa* ("dreadful") if the two legs are two palm-lengths apart (248.16)

- *sampuṭa* (“hemisphere”) (248.17)
- *swastika* (“well-being”): keeping the feet 16 fingers apart and lifting the feet a little (248.19)

A more detailed discussion of archery technique follows.

The section concludes by listing the names of actions or “deeds” possible with various weapons, including 32 positions to be taken with sword and shield (*khaḍgacarmavidhau*); 11 techniques for using a rope in fighting, 5 “acts in the rope operation,” lists of “deeds” pertaining to the chakram (war-quoit), the spear, the *tomara* (iron club), the gada (mace), the axe, the hammer, the *bhindipāla* or *laguda*, the vajra, the dagger, the slingshot, and a bludgeon or cudgel. A short passage near the end addresses larger concerns of warfare and explains the various uses of war elephants and men. The text concludes with a description of how to appropriately send the well-trained fighter off to war.

Extant texts

The surviving Dhanurvedic text is relatively late, found in the Agni Purana (chapters 249–252), which is no earlier than the eighth century. It is a revised version of earlier manuals, containing techniques and instructions for kings preparing for war and training their soldiers. Includes 5 training divisions - chariot warriors, elephants, cavalry, infantry and wrestlers; and five types of weapons – projected by machines (arrows and missiles), thrown by hand (spear), thrown by hands and held (slingshot), permanently held in hands (sword), and hands alone. The text states that Brahmins and Kshatriyas can teach martial arts and that lower castes can be soldiers.

The next surviving Dhanurveda-Samhita is from the mid-14th century by Brhata Sarngadhara Paddhati (ed. 1888).

Ausanasa Dhanurveda Sankalanam dates from the late 16th century, compiled under the patronage of Akbar. The 17th century Dhanurveda-samhita is attributed to Vasistha.