

**Armies, Wars and their Food** by D. Vijaya Rao, Delhi:  
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For anyone to talk and write about wars, the basic predicament is how to create novelty of information since subjects related to wars and heroism are so well covered both in text and folklore. This is precisely the aspect where the author, D. Vijaya Rao, has been able to achieve distinction. The author's technical knowledge, writing skills, and experience of working with the Defence Food Research Laboratory enables the 554-page book to delve into implied and understated principles and facts about wars from the prehistoric times to the latest form of warfare, without elaborating on the tactical aspects on which rich literature is already available.

Usually, books on wars and campaigns use the narrative of sequence of events or outlay strategies and philosophy adopted. History is replete with examples where writings on wars have highlighted different facets of the event, which are sometimes interestingly different. One issue which has rarely been covered along with wars and campaigns is the evolution of nutritional needs of soldiers and logistics of food. This book traces the evolution of not only the logistics of food but also the impact of changing times on food availability and the culinary habits of populations, in general, and soldiers, in particular.

The book traces food habits of prehistoric human beings from some 500,000 years ago and highlights the importance given to food management of soldiers since the Vedic times and later, especially during

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the rule of the Mauryan Dynasty. The narratives links the advent of wars with growing competition for food down the centuries, which subsequently got enshrined in the strategy of securing valleys and farm lands growing food grains. If carried forward, this can be associated with the current hypothesis, put forward by many authors, that wars in future would be fought over water. The book gives a vivid account of the art of war postulated in the Vedic times, especially by Chanakya and his disciples. One of the many highlights of the book is its indepth analysis of the *Puranas*, *Arthashastra*, *Sukranitis* and *Kamandakiya Nitisaara*, which gives an insight into the rich heritage of statecraft and military strategy in the Indian subcontinent before the Christian era. The book brings out subtle similarities and variances in the ancient arts of war followed by various empires and dynasties, including Ancient China, particularly in the pre- and post-Sun Tzu period, Rome, the Middle East, and other kingdoms as well as the Indian subcontinent. The author acknowledges that very little is available in literature regarding the food logistics of various armies in the past, particularly the period referred to in history as the Dark Ages (roughly 500 AD to 1600 AD). The book offers detailed statistical formats linking the salaries of soldiers at different times in history with the requirement of food according to the then prevalent norms because, for the most part of history, the soldiers were expected to buy their own food even during wars. It is interesting to note the various standards for measuring weights and volumes throughout the course of history. Standards were not only different from nation to nation but very frequently varied within nations. The author has successfully highlighted the linkage between the art of war, the method of camping and movement, the salaries of soldiers and their food requirements, and the subsequent action of loot and plunder after victory in a war. The advent of technology and its impact on warfare and advancement in the food processing industry for the benefit of soldiers has been well captured in the book. Even though old technologies were not able to provide the desired standard of food to the soldiers then, they were nonetheless, precursors to most of the technologies used by the food industry today for the masses, including the military. However, the book remains silent on the absence of the development of the art of war after the Chanakya era, and does not explain the reasons behind it.

The strength of the book lies in linking the art of warfare, socio-economic conditions prevailing at the time, and the knowledge of food science from prehistoric times to the modern day. The author has been

able to extrapolate the limited data available in historical documents on salaries, food habits, agricultural practices, and the strength of the armies to present a fairly accurate view of food logistics. Rao has rightly avoided a detailed description of modern wars and campaigns on which several accounts are already available in literature. The book presents a good account of food requirements and food logistics of modern-day militaries and their campaigns along with photographs, which enhance the content.

The book is strong in its narration and covers the food supply chain management of the Indian Armed Forces very well. The contrast between the logistics chain of the three services, i.e., the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force offers insight into prevalent culture within services. The extensive and varied bibliography, besides enriching the content of the book, provides a vast scope for further research. The uniqueness of the book lies in its subject—food needs of armies—explained in less technical terms which can be easily comprehended. However, in some sections of the book the reference to science and processing techniques may disinterest the reader who lacks background knowledge of basic food science.

The sections on the Indian Defence Services, though elaborate and descriptive, offer limited prescription. The individual contribution of various agencies notwithstanding, there is silence on the overall policy framework as is evident from the book. The section on recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, on which good data related to food logistics has been produced, could have been analysed and applied in the Indian context. The needs of the Indian armed forces, coupled with the varied culinary habits of Indian troops, present a challenging environment to food technologists.

The book succeeds in capturing the essence but has not been able to fully explain the systems limitations in addressing the gap between demand and supply. The author could have included the Indian operations in Sri Lanka and their impact on food logistics since it was one of the prolonged operations by the Indian forces in modern history away from its shores. The author could have also highlighted the barriers to the absorption of newer technology to improve food supply chain management in services. The book covers some rare aspect of food logistics, which are generally given low priority during the planning and conduct of military operations. Though not studied exclusively, the impact of good food logistics chain on prolonged operations cannot be underestimated. The author should

be commended for compiling rare information from historical texts and for providing personal accounts of the current military environment in our country on the issue of food logistics.