

ЖУРНАЛ ОБЩЕСТВА ИСТОРИЧЕСКОГО ОРУЖИЕВЕДЕНИЯ

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# ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЕ ОРУЖИЕВЕДЕНИЕ

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### On the Use of Indian Terms for Identification of Weapon Types

***Abstract:** The article focuses on the issues of the use of Indian words as name designations of cold weapon types. The terminology established at the present time is not questioned and is perceived as the actual authentic names of the objects, although the data have for the most part been received by the collectors of weapons from weapon sellers in India. The article shows that in most cases these terms are words from various Indian languages derived from the notions “cut”, “crack”, “damage”, and were used randomly for a range of cold weapons as the descriptions of actions performed using these weapons, rather than designation for their identification. The article also shows strong interrelation between the designations of weapon types and names of martial arts in which such weapons were used.*

***Key words:** arms of India, arms of Mughals, ethnic weapons, martial arts.*

In Europe from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries oriental fashion was reflected in architecture, literature, theatre and even casual clothes. Rooms designed in the “Eastern style” became frequent not only in palaces or noble mansions, but also in the middle class apartments throughout Europe. Of course, the demand was fully satisfied. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was still a huge amount of souvenir weapons on offer at the markets of India. Prince Alexei Dmitriyevich Saltykov, travelling through India in 1840-s, noted the variety of weapons offered to foreigners together with “pieces of ivory” and “different knickknacks and paintings”.

Weapons sold in the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries at the Indian markets were certainly typologically similar to real weapons, although manufactured as souvenirs and handicrafts. Therefore the quality of information the customer learnt about the name, features, and origin of a weapon type depended on the seller`s knowledge of the weapon. The provided information must have been variable depending on the place of purchase and language spoken by the seller. Thus, the Indian weapons classification was grounded on the classification according to the purchase place and definition of an object by the term which as a matter of fact in most cases had been a



generic term for designation of this type of weapon in a local language. Currently, real facts about the origin, purpose and names of Indian weapons are only to be established on the basis of sparse information from primary sources, as such only life stories and diaries of the contemporaries can be considered, i.g. the memoirs of Babur or Jahangir. Yet in any case, when using an established and long-present classification, it is essential to realize its relativity and conditional character.

Taking into account the aforementioned, an attempt appears to be interesting to observe Indian weapons from the point of their use – traditional weapons training

systems, in which like in any closed specialized system information could be preserved longer and be more accurate.

From two independent sources the descriptions of traditional martial practices in Muslim Lucknow, which ceased to exist by the late 19th century, are known. First source is the description of the culture of Lucknow at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries made by the historian and writer Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1926)<sup>1</sup>. Second source are works by the poet Mir Zamir (1791-1855), who also lived in Lucknow and primarily described battle scenes and military exploits<sup>2</sup>. When using these sources, account should be taken of the fact that the mentioned authors were close to neither studies in weaponry, nor martial arts, and made their descriptions from hearsay. But considering recent knowledge of Indian weapons, with somewhat discretion, treatment of the weapons having actually been in use and described by these authors could be given. First of all, it is necessary to make clear that Sharar`s use of the definition "Arab" means "Arab culture that has come from Persia"<sup>3</sup>. Considering the Persian fashion, existing in India from the moment first Muslim kingdoms appeared on its territory, this could refer to either actual Arab, or Persian occurrences, or merely new, fashionable things with emphasized noble status. Also when analyzing the mentioned sources associated with the culture of Lucknow, the Urdu language should be preferred from all the languages widespread in India.

A knife fight called "bank" is described. This fighting art had been practiced by both Indians and Muslims since long ago, but the weapon types used were different. The Indian dagger was straight and double-edged, whereas the "Arab one" was recurved and single-edged. Later a recurved dagger having a tetrahedral blade began to be used, which inflicted cloverleaf poorly healing wounds. The word "bank" itself means "curved" and indicates the recurved shape of the blade. In this regard, it must be clarified that according to numerous descriptions left by the British, as well as the analysis of the survived practices, the Indian technique of using cold bladed weapons differed from that of the Europeans. In particular, the arm was never unbent at elbow, due to which the blows were delivered in circular movements. In case of a dagger that implied not piercing, but cutting, "tearing" blows, working as an animal`s claw, which fitted good into the worldview of the Indians, being associated to the tiger`s image. Such blows did not have to be deadly. In real martial arts a blow struck was normally not to be the only one, unless it was final in a series of consecutive actions. The limbs were always attacked in the first place, making the adversary unable to resist, after which the finishing deadly blow was struck. This technique was employed in martial arts even when using the



"jamdhar" push dagger with an H-shaped handle, for which he was seized in a complex grip at the intersection of the cross bar with the side bar, a necessary angle of the blade to the forearm being formed. But most comfortable this technique was in case curved daggers were used, held in reverse grip with the blade pointing down.

Concerning the "Arab" single edged dagger mentioned first two suggestions could be made. The first one is that it was the single edged jambia. Examples of such daggers are known and described by Stone as an Indo-Persian form featuring a straight upper blade, single edge, T-shaped spine and curved double edged lower blade<sup>4</sup>. Second suggestion refers to a piece arising lots of arguments with its appearance and purpose. What is meant is the single edged "Marathi knife" of crescent form, known today as the "bank". The following facts are to be considered. There are no grounds to believe this piece is exclusively Marathi's. "Bank", the knife's name meaning "curved", is similar to the name of a knife fighting art and originates from Urdu<sup>5</sup>. Of much greater interest is the following aspect. The technique of striking tearing blows mentioned above was used when holding the knife in reverse grip, blade pointing down, which allowed for the necessary angle of the dagger in case of straight daggers and especially of curved ones. Yet when trying to make use of a similar technique by holding the knife in direct grip, then the only acceptable shape would be the one of a hook or a crescent. Whereby having a single edge would be enough. Apparently, it is these curved daggers (or knives) that gave name to the martial art in which they were used, and then the weapon used began to be called by this word, regardless of its certain type. Remarkable is that Lord Egerton shows the images of typical Indian curved daggers (not crescent shaped) twice, calling them "bank"<sup>6</sup>.

It is very likely that the straight double edged dagger used by Indians was the dagger described in *Ain-i-Akbari* as "katar". Interestingly enough, the Indian authentic schools of martial arts also made use of straight daggers. Generally speaking, the word "katar" was a collective term for daggers and derived from the stem "kat" meaning "cut" or "wound". Some authors describe straight "stiletto-like" weapons<sup>7</sup> or objects resembling the dirk (Scotch dagger)<sup>8</sup> by this word. It is of interest to note regarding this object that Lord Egerton indicated Nepal as the place of origin of this weapon type. Indeed, there is an inexplicably great number of old Indian katars originating from Nepal. The



walls of the temple in the Kirtipura palace are still furnished with the compositions of these daggers. Probably, it could be explained the following way. On the morrow of the rebellion of ascetics (fakirs and sannyasis) in Bihar and Bengal, their detachments fled to Nepal, which had been used by the ascetics as a rear base during the revolt and where they had taken shelter from persecutions and replenished their forces. The rebellion managed to be eventually suppressed only when the British administration agreed with the rulers of Nepal (and Butan) to ban the armed monks from being present on their territory<sup>9</sup>. As a result. the monks settled on the territory of Nepal and with the time sannyasis even started to be regarded as a separate caste. Nepal has long been a strong point of ascetics and they have been actively taking part in its military and political life<sup>10</sup>. The ascetics` tradition to decorate their temples with weapons is also spread on the territory of India<sup>11</sup>.

There is a further point to be made about a push dagger with an H-shaped cross handle, known as the "jamdhar". A popular dispute about the correct name of this object existing today in the weapon studies - katar or jamdhar- has no grounds. Throughout the history known both these names has been used. The earliest references tell the following. Ibn Battuta in the Delhi Sultanate in 1343 called this object "kattarah"<sup>12</sup>, while Babur distinguished three types of daggers: "hanzhar", "kitareh" and "jamdher"<sup>13</sup>.

It should also be noted that there was a custom to call objects according to the blade material. So, for example, the term "sukhela" is not a distinct weapon type, but refers to the fact that the blade is made of "sukhela" - a combination of soft and hard iron, or, according to some sources, an inexpensive wootz steel type.

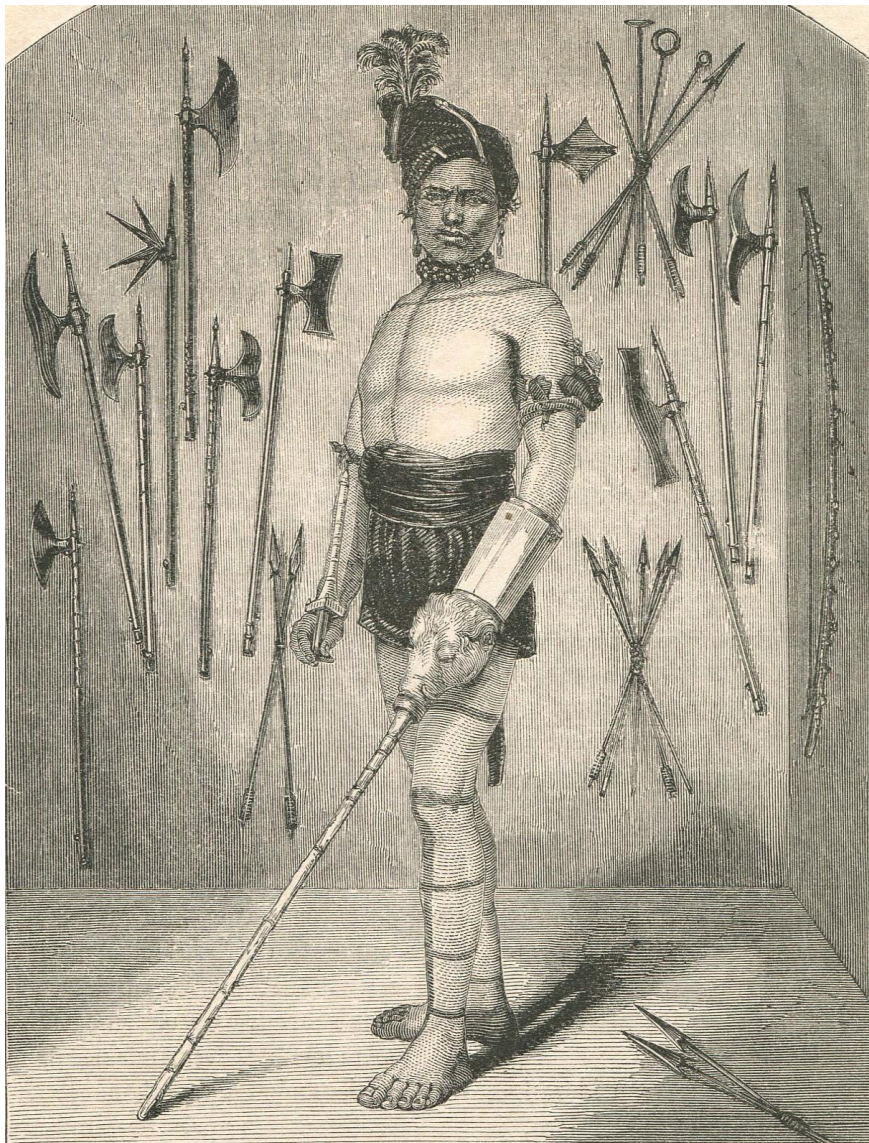
In 1897 Bramley P., Deputy Inspector-General of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh Police, delivered a lecture on the Indian swordsmanship before the officers of the 5-th Dragoon Regiment in Meerut<sup>14</sup>. Some examples of cold weapons used by Indians were also presented by him. Bramley refers to the dagger fighting art as "bichwa". And demonstrates a corresponding dagger "bichwa", not mentioning any of its design features. Colonel Baden-Powell also describes the "bichwa" dagger as a common dagger featuring a double curved blade and a sword-like guard, meaning an additional protection of the hand in the form of a bow connecting the crossguard and the pommel<sup>15</sup>. The etymology of the dagger`s name "bichwa" is usually traced down to the comparison of its shape to the scorpion`s sting, suggesting that this type of weapon originates from daggers made of one-piece horn, in which a through-hole for the hand was cut. Doubts in such a treatment are possible taking into account how relatively a horn looks like a scorpion`s sting, as

well as the differences in pronunciation and spelling of the word "bichwa" when defining a scorpion and a dagger type. It should rather be noted that both these words derive from one and the same term meaning "damage" or "cut"<sup>16</sup>. It should be assumed that "bichwa" is the regional name of a dagger with a guard bow. It is notable that Lord Egerton uses this term to describe a common double curved Indian dagger with a side guard, in other cases calling it "khanjar" or "chilnum"<sup>17</sup>, which was considered an error before. In view of the above, any of the mentioned names can be applied to such a dagger.

Known is one of the training types in the Muslim martial practices - "pata khilana". While the second word simply means "move" or "exercise", there are reasons to doubt the unambiguous interpretation of the first word. Generally accepted and established is the meaning of this word as a sword with a gauntlet, for some reason, being interpreted as "leaf" of grass or a plant, or a "sword blade". The existing descriptions of the practice "pata khilana", compiled by Sharar from snippets of memories and evidence, are a mixture of exercises with a wooden staff, exercises with a "wooden sword" and immediately with the iron "pata" sword. But it is the "wooden sword" that is most commonly mentioned. Whereupon the "wooden sword" for the common fencing could be excluded from the observation, as this object is widely known and described a number of times under specific names as a separate type of training weapon in Indian practices. The practices using such an object were described by Sharar separately, what is more, it does not allow to carry out actions attributed to the art of "pata khilana". The word "pata" denoting a weapon also appears in Tarikh-i-Husain Shahi (Durrani-namah), the history of the Durrani dynasty, which was worked on by Imam ud-din Husaini Chishti for several years and finished in 1798. He mentions that the Marathas had a detachment of several thousand "pathabaz" in the battle of Panipat in 1761, and this word in the Deccani language meant exactly warriors armed with swords, or "skilled" warriors<sup>18</sup>. If those warriors had been armed with common swords, then most probably they would have been referred to as shamshirs and saifs in the Deccani language. Furthermore, there is a mention in Jahangir's memoirs about exercising in swordplay, which was called "pultabazi" in Deccani<sup>19</sup>. The translator remarks that he was not able to find the meaning of the word "pulta", but according to the suggestion of his friend William Irvine, who authored the work "The Army of the Moghuls", this word is to be read as "patta" and understood as a wooden sword. Also suggested could be the variant "special positions" stated by the same translator in the context of the art of swordsmanship, or the word "pulta" in the meaning "reaction" or

"react"<sup>20</sup>, and relate them to the meaning "skilled warriors" appearing in Durrani-namah. But it seems to be more reasonable to note that the Urdu language, which is very close to Deccani, has the only weapon interpretation of the word "pata", which denotes a wooden stick, wooden sword, as well as a "rapier"<sup>21</sup>. The same word appears in one of Hindi dictionaries<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, there is an object which looked functionally similar to both a wooden stick and a staff, and was also used as a wooden training sword (rapier) when training "skilled warriors", thereafter fighting with a real sword. And most probably, this real sword was not a common shamshir or a usual saif. In such a situation one can not help drawing an analogy to the object used by the Khond people back in the mid 19th century.



The Khonds lived in the immediate contact with the Marathas, Deccan sultanates, and on the territories being part of the Vijayanagara and Mughal empires,



that is at the juncture of the Mughal, southern India and Maratha cultures. This refers to the object with a blade of bamboo and closed guard of a boar head connected to the wooden vambrace, i.e. a classic construction of the sword with a gauntlet<sup>23</sup>.

Known are south-Indian objects of a similar construction, but having an iron blade and a covering part shaped as an animal head cut completely from wood. The existence of similar in construction training swords with a wooden gauntlet and a bamboo blade could be suggested.

It should be added that the mentioned picture shows a common wooden sword used for training swordsmen throughout India. It is quite conceivable that it is in isolated societies, which the Khonds, residing in the mountain regions, undoubtedly were, that the practices could survive of which only names were left in the rest of India. The use of a wooden object similar in construction to the real iron sword for training purposes appears to be quite reasonable. The name "pata" could have either been transferred from the wooden object to the iron one, or vice versa. Also possible is the mixed use of similar consonant words. And while a training sword was called by the term denoting a wooden sword, the name of its iron version could have later be associated with the word similar in pronunciation and spelling, yet meaning "cut" or "divide" in Punjabi. It is of interest to note that for the basic notions, such as "break in parts", "cut into pieces", "chip", "fragment" the three Indian languages in their old variants provide the words which are similar in sound and spelling to the denotations of three types of Indian swords known in weaponry study: in Hindi and Marathi - "khanda", in Pundjabi - "pata" and in Urdu - "kirch"<sup>24</sup>.

As to the sword's name khanda the leading scholars also provide a consonant word meaning "shoulders"<sup>25</sup>, which in the old Hindi language was strangely enough used as part of the phrases meaning "to injure a body" or "cut through a body". Probably it is related to damaging the upper part of the body, beheading (only leaving shoulders), or "striking from the shoulder". This kind of phrase was often used by the Indian poet Chand Bardai, who lived in the 12th century<sup>26</sup>. The Indians themselves in most cases used the word saif regardless of the type of the sword.

Drawing a conclusion, it should be mentioned that there were much closer relations and communications in India than is commonly believed. Throughout the centuries the trade routes were open binding the subcontinent from Afghanistan and Nepal to southern India. The territories were many times united under the rule of the Muslim sultanates, Mughals and Marathas. Mercenaries from the Arabs, Afghans, Rajputs and Jats were hired and served on the entire territory of North and Central

India. The Deccan sultanates and Marathas dealt closely with the Vijayanagara Empire of the South India. At the height of their power, the Marathas spread their military culture across most of the subcontinent. Taking into account the above facts, it seems to be unpromising to classify the types of weapons by the ethnic and territorial traits, except for the weapons of the isolated "wild" tribes. It is also necessary to use with a certain discretion the names of weapon types fixed by collectors in the 19th century, rather than that of ethnographers, as the former in most cases denoted generic names derived from the notions "cut" or "damage".

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<sup>1</sup> Sharar Ablul Halim. Lucknow: the last phase of an oriental culture. Oxford University Press, 1994

<sup>2</sup> Trivedi Madhu. The Making of the Awadh Culture. Primus Books, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Sharar Ablul Halim. Op. cit. P. 109.

<sup>4</sup> Stone G.C. A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armor: in All Countries and in All Times. Courier Corporation, 2013. P. 312.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, J.T. A Dictionary of Oordoo and English, compiled from the best authorities, and arranged according to the order of the English alphabet. Serampore, 1838. P. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Plate I, Plate IX, 335. Egerton Lord of Tatton. Indian and Oriental Arms and Armour. London, 1896.

<sup>7</sup> Sharar Ablul Halim. Op. cit. P. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Ja'far Sharīf. Qanoon-e-Islam: Or, The Customs of the Moosulmans of India; Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth Till the Hour of Death. London, 1832. P. 295.

<sup>9</sup> For the role of Nepal for the ascetics during the rebellion please see Bhattacharya, Ananda, Sannyasi and Fakir Rebellion in Bihar (1767-1800), *Islam and Muslim Societies: A Social Science Journal* Vol. 6, No. 2 (2013), pp. 28-44.

<sup>10</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a Naga detachment took part in the war for the control over the Kathmandu valley. An episode is known when a detachment of 500 Nagas were completely killed in a battle.

<sup>11</sup> Farquhar, J.N., The Organization of the Sannyasis of the Vedanta, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* No. 3 (Jul., 1925), pp. 479-486, p. 485.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Baṭūṭah. Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah, texte arabe, accompagné d' une tr. par C. Defrémery et B.R. Sanguinetti. 4 tom. [and] Index alphabétique. Paris, 1858. P. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Bābur. Memoirs of Zehir-Ed-Din Muhammed Baber: Emperor of Hindustan. London, 1826. P. 338.

<sup>14</sup> Bramley P. Cold Steel, and Indian Swordsmanship, *The Journal of the United Service Institution of India*. vol. XXVIII No134: Jan 1899. P. 74-87.

<sup>15</sup> Baden-Powell B.H. Hand-book of the Manufactures & Arts of the Punjab. Punjab Printing Company, 1872. P. 292.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson J.T. Op. cit. P. 35; A Dictionary of the Panjābī language, Lodiana. American Presbyterian mission. Printed at the Mission Press, 1854. P. 338; Bahri Hardev. Advanced learner's Hindi English Dictionary. vol. 2. Rajpal & Sons, 2006. P. 1220.

<sup>17</sup> Plate X, 494. Egerton. Op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Irvine W. The Army of the Indian Moghuls. London, 1903. P. 165.

<sup>19</sup> Jahangir. Op. cit. P. 253.

<sup>20</sup> Shakespeare J. A Dictionary: Hindustani and English and English and Hindustani. Pelham Richardson, 1849. P. 2362.

<sup>21</sup> Thompson J.T. Op. cit. P. 424.

<sup>22</sup> Bahri Hardev. Op. cit. P. 1005.

<sup>23</sup> Campbell J., A Personal Narrative of Thirteen Years Service Amongst the Wild Tribes of Khondistan. London, 1864. P. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Bahri Hardev. Op. cit. P. 400; Baba Padmanji. Op. cit. P. 77; A Dictionary of the Panjābī language. Lodiana. American Presbyterian mission. Printed at the Mission Press, 1854. P. 305; Thompson J.T. Op. cit. P. 242.

<sup>25</sup> Khorasani M.M., Lexicon of Arms and Armor from Iran. A Study of Symbols and Terminology, Legat Publisher, 2010. P. 214.

<sup>26</sup> Bibliotheca Indica: Collection of Oriental Works Published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol. 77, Calcutta, 1873-1886). P. 60.