

Manoeuvre warfare is not a war history essay



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2. Doctrinal Base. Manoeuvre warfare has been adopted as the doctrinal basis for various Western armies. The Indian Army has been loosely following it in both theory as well as practice for quite some time, but is still grappling to adopt it as basis of our war fighting philosophy. It would take more than rhetoric to actually transform this concept into practice; there remains a lot of confusion as to what exactly it entails. Out of the many existing definitions only few are capable of concisely and clearly defining what Manoeuvre warfare is and how one does it. Manoeuvre is more of a philosophical approach to campaign design and execution than an arrangement of tactical engagements. Art and philosophy are often the most common terms describing the concept and definition of Manoeuvre warfare. It can be described as the art of tactics concerned with creation of battle array, decision making and understanding the human dimension rather than a science associated with techniques, procedures and capabilities,

3. Difficult to Understand. Being an art associated with philosophical concept of war fighting; it leaves a lot to the interpretation and understanding of a theorist whose vision is generally obscured by his basic psyche, experience and the knowledge base available to him or his capability to grasp the concept of Manoeuvre. More often than not one acts on the lines of six blind men who wanted to describe an elephant and each used his imagination according to the part of elephant he was touching: -

So six blind men of Hindustan

Disputed loud and long,

Each in his own opinion

Exceeding stiff and strong;

Though each was partly in the right,

They all were in the wrong!

Applicability yet Of Manoeuvre Warfare

4. Spatial concept? Manoeuvre is traditionally thought of as a spatial concept which is used to gain positional advantage. The US Marine concept of manoeuvre warfare however is “ war fighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy’s cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope”.[2]The manual further says: “ This is not to imply that firepower is unimportant. On the contrary, firepower is central to manoeuvre warfare. Nor do we mean to imply that we will pass up the opportunity to physically destroy the enemy. We will concentrate fires and forces at decisive points to destroy enemy elements when the opportunity presents itself and when it fits our larger purposes”.[3]

5. Should We Adopt it. When deciding upon the war fighting doctrine a nation should deliberate upon a basic question that is – “ how to achieve victory in an acceptable time frame which is economical in terms of men and material? “. The answer we seek must be viewed in light of various functions such as the nation’s military might, economic and political standing in world order compared to his perceived adversaries, likely threat perception and expected duration of war. The Indian Army doctrine does directs our focus on the intellectual understanding, institutionalisation and implementation of Manoeuvre warfare in its chapter on Operational Perspective[4]however, <https://assignbuster.com/manoeuvre-warfare-is-not-a-war-history-essay/>

remains uncommitted on deciding manoeuvre warfare as our basic war fighting philosophy.

6. Mechanised Association. Since most astounding victories associated with Manoeuvre have a mechanised background, it is often considered to be a word of mechanised domain. The most common examples given is that of “Blitzkrieg” or Rommel and Patton’s gallop across Gazala and the plains of Sicily respectively. Though most of us know that Rommel was an audacious practitioner of manoeuvre warfare during WW -II in his daring exploits but a few actually seemed to be aware of the fact that he learned and perfected his manoeuvre skills as an infantry soldier in WW- I. Indeed it can be debated that the German war philosophy in second World War was deeply influenced by Rommel’s World war I infantry experiences and his

book[5]that grew out of those experiences. This lack of historical and conceptual understanding further deepens the dilemma of its applicability in Indian context especially in mountains.

7. Applicability in Mountains. In light of above mentioned aspects we must ask ourselves if manoeuvre warfare is solely applicable to conventional conflicts typified by massed formations of armoured vehicles? Or, are the principles and methods equally applicable to mountainous terrain?. The key to manoeuvre warfare, as expressed by proponents like William Lind and Robert Leonhard, was defeating the enemy by attacking his critical vulnerability rather than going toe-to-toe with his strength. This implies that in difficult terrain like mountains where critical vulnerabilities are of

paramount importance and play decisive roles in the success of operations, the manoeuvre warfare assumes rather greater significance.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Battles are won by slaughter and maneuver. The greater the general, the more he contributes in maneuver, the less he demands in slaughter.

– Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 1923

Statement of the Problem

8. Manoeuvre warfare is considered to be synonymous with mechanised operations and desert terrain by most of us. This thought process restrain us from tapping the actual potential of this universal war fighting philosophy, whose applicability is irrespective of the type of terrain or the arm using it . The aim of this paper is to analyse the concept of manoeuvre warfare as the war fighting philosophy for Indian Army and examine the feasibility of its application in mountainous terrain in Indian context.

Hypothesis

9. Manoeuvre warfare is not a hard science and does not have a rigid list of theorems or formulae, which can define its applicability to a particular arm or terrain. It is very much applicable in Indian context, especially to mountainous terrain.

Justification of the Study

10. Inability to Accept Manoeuvre Warfare. Over the years we have developed an attrition-based approach to warfare. Our training institutes are

teaching tactics as a science - having set piece solutions with mathematical framework and rigid utilization of resources. Though we claim to accept most logical and workable solutions but nine out of ten exercises end up with same lessons and solutions being culled out in the end. Another factor, which largely contribute towards our inability to accept manoeuvre warfare at tactical level is our fascination to adopt westernised terms and concepts. This is acceptable till they are used as building blocks to enhance our operational efficiency. But when templated without giving a proper thought to the fiber of our society, training and our basic approach towards life and philosophy[6]- results in mere lip service and resentment at grass root level where they are to be executed. This misleads them to perceive manoeuvre warfare as extension of widespread military jargon or another fascinating word for " what we have always done" or " common sense tactics"[7]. This needs an urgent change in thought process.

11. Geo-Politico-Military Factor. India is wedged between two hostile neighbours having boundary disputes with both, which can lead to a potential conflict in future. With western adversary we enjoying vast superiority both in numbers and economy but the situation is not so very same with the eastern. Indian philosophy and ethos are against loss of any territory this when coupled with no first use of force places the military force at initial disadvantage of wresting the initiative before any conflict. This more or less drives India towards the attritionist practices in war where territory is of vital importance and its loss is unacceptable even in lieu of operational or tactical advantage it accrues. Superior force ratios are considered necessary to protect or regain the lost territory at any cost.

12. Battle Field Milieu. These potential situations when coupled with future battlefield scenario having nuclear backdrop, own political will and international pressure assures high intensity, fluid, short term and intense battle field in a reactive scenario. Such characterized conflicts can't be won just by attritionist approach. We need a philosophy, which provides us victory in shortest time frame with economy in men and material.

13. With approximately two third of our borders resting on the high mastiffs of mountainous terrain, it is easy to acquire a defensive mentality and orthodox approach to war fighting. This attitude stems from a blinkered outlook that any other approach to warfare is of no concern in this topography and the war will be nothing but a peak to peak slogging match. In the light of these, it is imperative that one takes a fresh look at our approach to warfare and reconsiders the applicability of manoeuvre warfare to mountainous terrain to win any future conflicts with minimal losses and within acceptable/quickest timeframe. We must understand that manoeuvrist approach to operations is as important to a commander in the high mountains as it is to a mounted general.

Scope

14. This paper carries out an analysis of modern works on the theory of Manoeuvre warfare and tries to establish link between various theories and figure out basic components of manoeuvre warfare. The work just touches the concept based on the premise that basic knowledge of manoeuvre exist with the reader The scope will be limited to the instigating the aspects needing attention in the Indian army's basic doctrine and war philosophy to make it more manoeuvristic. The paper will concentrate more on

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organisational, institutional and functional changes necessary to facilitate this and the explore the concepts that can be applied while operating in mountainous terrain.

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Methods of Data Collection

15. Books, military journals and periodical have been referred to from Defence Services Staff College Library, online sources and personal subscriptions contributed towards the research. Some contents have also been taken from the interviews of German generals after World War II (WW II) which were available from Defence Sites after translations. My own understanding of subject that accrued from discussions with peers, seniors and the Guide Directing Staff Colonel Rohit Mehta on the topic has come handy in making few suggestions for the dissertation. The casual discussion with Gen (Retd) HS Panag and lecture by Gen (Retd) Mehta in DSSC were instrumental in shaping the ideas expressed in the research. The bibliography of sources is affixed at the end of the document

Organisation of Data

16. The text has been divided into five chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion. The initial chapters examine the essential elements of Manoeuvre warfare and how it differs from attrition warfare with special reference to analysis of modern writings on the subject and culls out the essence of these theories. The next chapter deals with relevance of this theory in the Indian context. The penultimate chapter is a follow up of the previous chapter and highlights the organisational, institutional and functional changes necessary for implementing manoeuvre theory by Indian

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Army. The next chapter gives some recommendations to apply the concept of manoeuvre warfare in mountainous terrain bordering India. Thereafter reiterating the essence of what has been said in the entire dissertation the conclusion settles the dissertation.

CHAPTER III

UNDERSTANDING MANOEUVRE WARFARE

“... Manoeuvre theory has nothing to do with vast numbers of men and machines charging down the countryside. Manoeuvre theory is about amplifying the force which a small mass is capable of exerting; it is synonymous with the Indirect Approach”.

-Richard E Simpkin

Evolution of Manoeuvre Theory

17. Manoeuvre warfare is a philosophy for “ fighting smart” to ensure success in war. The first manoeuvre on a large scale in battle, recorded in history, was during the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC[8]. In this battle, the Greeks under Miltiades scored a decisive victory through manoeuvre where the Greek phalanx hit the Persians from both flanks inflicting a total defeat. However, Alexander the Great can be considered as the first great practitioner of art of manoeuvre. Most of his victories are classic examples of Manoeuvre warfare. In 331 BC in the battle of Arbela he defeated Persian monarch, Darius III who had a numerical superiority of 5: 1 against him. Sun Tzu also captured the essence of this philosophy in his classic work[9].

18. The most important development of manoeuvre theories took place in Germany and the USSR during the 1920s and 1930s, notably with the <https://assignbuster.com/manoeuvre-warfare-is-not-a-war-history-essay/>

development of the “ Deep Battle” concept that was integrated into the Red Army field regulations doctrine by Marshal Tukhachevsky[10]. While the Wehrmacht developed from this the operations named Blitzkrieg, in the USSR this led to the creation of the Cavalry Mechanised Groups during the Second World War, and the Operational manoeuvre groups during the Cold War.[11]The Soviets used the concept of “ Deep Battle” (which they continued through the Cold War).

19. In spite of all these years of rich history, only recently has a clear and acceptable definition of Manoeuvre warfare has been offered for modern tactics and operations. Two of the best works on modern manoeuvre warfare come from Robert R Leonhard[12]and William S Lind[13]. While they both draw heavily from Sun Tzu, Richard Simpkin, Sir Basil Liddell-Hart and Second World War German and Russian theories, they synthesize these thoughts and produce what could be called the modern school of Manoeuvre warfare.

Modern Works On Manoeuvre Warfare

20. William S Lind & Observe, Orient, Decide, Act (OODA) Cycle. Lind’s understanding of manoeuvre warfare theory is based basically on the research done by Retired Air Force Colonel John Boyd, who studied the US success with the F-86 fighter aircraft in combat over Korea fighter aircraft and derived Boyd Theory, “ Pattern of conflicts”[14]. He observed that fighter pilots, who were able to observe their opponent, orient themselves to the situation, decide on a course of action and act upon decided action faster than their enemy counterparts usually embraced victory. The idea was that the pilot who went through his OODA loop also known as a Boyd Cycle) faster

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than his opponent was able to render his opponent's actions irrelevant and gain the upper hand in the dogfight. Lind uses this as base to conceptualise Manoeuvre theory and summarise it as- " Conflict can be seen as time-competitive cycles." [15] He concluded that the armies, which are able to decide, move and fight faster, would quickly render the enemy's reactions irrelevant and would result in destroying his cohesion. The enemy who finds the irrelevancy of his actions with each passing moment are subjected to " panic or become passive and this is an ideal outcome for the victor, because a panicked or passive enemy can be annihilated or captured at the lowest cost in friendly casualties." [16]

21. To achieve such end state ground forces must have capability to conduct faster Boyd Cycles/OODA cycle . The various methods suggested by Lind are Decentralized Command and Control, Initiative at all levels of command to exploit the fleeting opportunities. Mission-Type Orders that tell subordinates only the intent of higher commander and not how to achieve it; the designation of a Main Effort to focus the resources at disposal towards common objective to promote Unity of Effort and reliance on Reconnaissance Pull to Exploit Gaps and Avoid Surfaces in enemy defence. He further adds that Manoeuvre warfare means not only to Accept confusion and disorder but also successfully operates in it and warns to avoid all patterns, recipes and formulae i. e. to say Be Unpredictable and achieve surprise. [17]

22. Therefore, it can be understood the soul of Lind's theory is tempo which is supported by Sun Tzu - " What is of the greatest importance in war is extraordinary speed; one cannot afford to neglect opportunity . . . An attack may lack ingenuity, but it must be delivered with supernatural speed" and <https://assignbuster.com/manoeuvre-warfare-is-not-a-war-history-essay/>

further explained by Richard Simpkin as – the operational rate of advance.

[18]

23. Robert Leonhard and Art of Manoeuvre. Leonhard expands upon Lind's theory of manoeuvre warfare by looking beyond tempo to other methods of defeating enemy. But agrees with Lind on defeating enemy with the minimal necessary force. As described by Leonhard, manoeuvre warfare “ attempts to defeat the enemy through means other than the simple destruction of his mass.”[19]The ‘ other means’ of Leonhard include –

(a) Pre-Emption which is the most economical and often most successful method to defeat enemy. “ Indeed the highest and purest application of maneuver theory is to pre-empt the enemy, that is, to disarm or neutralize him before the fight.”[20]This is in consonance with Lind's emphasis on tempo and Boyd Cycles.

(b) Dislocation is regarded as the next most preferred method, after pre-emption, i. e., which he explains as “...removing the enemy from the decisive point, or vice versa, thus rendering them useless and irrelevant to the fight.”[21]Dislocation can be further sub divided as – positional or functional dislocation. Positional dislocation involves making the enemy's location irrelevant through Manoeuvre while Functional dislocation refers to rendering an enemy's strength irrelevant.

(c) Disruption as the third method for defeating the enemy more economically. He defines it as attacking the enemy's Centre of gravity(COG), which he further explain using the King & Queen theory[22]-taking analogy from game of chess to he describe the understanding of of COG for

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attritionist as the queen or source of strength and for manoeuvrist as king or the critical vulnerability. Which when addressed causes the enemy to lose cohesion and the will to fight. Disruption is closely linked to battlefield psychology and its target is not the enemy forces per se but rather the mind of enemy commander

Essentials of Manoeuvre Warfare.

24. Other than the concepts mentioned above; keeping present and future battle field – Directive Style Of Command, Mission Type Orders, Small Team Concept, Integrated Battle Approach With True Jointmanship, Simultaneity Of Operations, Mental Mobility Of Commanders at all levels and High Initiative with Mastering The Basic Skills are other essentials demanded for a manoeuvristic approach. There is a large gap between the philosophical concept and its practical application. Manoeuvre warfare is not a concept that can be practiced independently by tactical units. It requires the support of entire army as well as each individual soldier for the required transformation.

Manoeuvre Vs Attrition.

25. In most situations, attrition warfare is best able to achieve the principle of concentration of force, unity of command, security, cooperation and simplicity. The outcome of WWI was decided by attrition. If either side had been able to force part of the enemy alliance from the field, it would have reduced the enemy's available resources and forces. Additionally it would have forced the enemy to spread its fewer forces over a larger area, potentially allowing greater room for maneuver. However attrition was forced on the belligerents until the combat power ratios[23] were changed and the <https://assignbuster.com/manoeuvre-warfare-is-not-a-war-history-essay/>

Allies gained a clear advantage. It is a comparatively simple way to wage war and demands little initiative from subordinates. Higher commanders with the help of staff available plan battles in micro details whereas junior officers merely follow orders to the cut. However, this makes attrition war predictable and sequential.

26. By contrast, manoeuvre warfare regards application of military force as only one of the ways of to the attain politico - military aim. Manoeuvre warfare draws its power mainly from opportunities and still more on winning the battle of wills by surprise or, failing this, by speed and aptness of response.[24]Manoeuvre warfare is thus concerned with amplifying the force, which a small mass is capable of exerting and conveying a threat commensurate with the mission.

Field Commanders Adoption of Different Warfare in Similar Situations.

27. Field Marshal Montgomery and General Patton were two of the most effective allied commanders who were faced with roughly similar conditions, practiced effective dissimilar methods of war fighting. While Patton stressed on audacity, surprise, speed and always relied on mental mobility of subordinate commanders to exploit battle opportunities, Montgomery emphasised on caution and preferred a balanced orthodox approach. Montgomery has often been criticised for his aversion to taking risk but his approach to war was certainly an effort to minimise the risk. Comparing the two commanders lead to deduction that both concepts focus on compelling the enemy to do our will or reducing his ability to resist us until he finally accedes to our will[25]. A major assumption is that a war of manoeuvre is of

a higher order than a war of attrition and that the general who defeats his enemy in a war of manoeuvre is superior to another who practices attrition warfare. Many still think of General Grant as a “the butcher” owing to the methods he used to defeat the Confederate armies or have general belief that all World War I generals lacked inspiration because they seemed incapable of breaking the stalemate at the front. Which certainly needs reconsideration, as both the theories are complimentary.

Different Wars.

28. Wars of manoeuvre can be referred as wars of annihilation or destruction because the enemy's ability or will to fight is annihilated after a decisive battle or a series of decisive battles in different theatres. Whereas wars of attrition may be referred as wars of exhaustion as they focus on the enemy's ability or will to resist be exhausted. Attrition wars can be presumed to be more costly in terms of loss of personnel, materiel and time unless one side completely dominates the other. In contrast to attrition theory, which concentrates on the enemy's field forces, manoeuvre theory thrives on outperforming the enemy's thought processes with the intent to destroy force cohesion.

Why Modern Wars Become Attrition Wars?

29. The inspiration for the attrition theory basically comes from Clausewitz's 'Vernichtungsprinzip' or principle of annihilation.[26] If wars of attrition are generally more costly than wars of maneuver and practitioners of attrition are perceived as less enlightened than those who succeed through maneuver and a decisive battle, then why do modern wars so often become wars of attrition? There are reasons to it:

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- (a) Often the combat power that can be generated at the “ front” is almost equal. Temporary stalemate and attrition follow until one side achieves a advantage in terms of numbers, firepower, leadership, manoeuvre, protection or Information.
- (b) Perception that the chances of success through a strategy of attrition have less risk element and uncertainty for the commander.
- (c) Nations which, possess a large army and and population which accepts the loss of lives in wars as a natural outcome accept attrition warfare.
- (d) When asymmetry exist between two warring fractions attrition warfare is followed unconsciously by superior fraction.

The Other Side Of Manoeuvre Theory

30. Every coin has a flip side so as every theory. There are certain conditions to be fulfilled while practicing this type of warfare. This requires additional effort

compare to attrition theory of warfare.

- (a) Dependence upon individual leadership.
- (b) There are also immense and glaring cultural differences between a decentralised manoeuvre military and a centralized attritional service. Attaining the latter involves people, time, and resources while the former requires something more rare and difficult to achieve and that is the development of military tradition, free thinking by soldiers and commanders, mutual trust at all levels and education in the military art.

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(c) Delegation of responsibility by higher commander for crucial combat decisions to subordinates implies highest degree of interpersonal understanding and trust not easily achievable. Such trust and understanding must be forged within the framework of a mutual drive towards the achievement of final objective. Creating such frame of reference and bonding of shared values and morals is exceedingly difficult to achieve.

(d) Involvement of higher degree of risk and uncertainty. Maneuver warfare usually entails more risk. There is consoling certainty in programing warfare as quantifiable, logically measurable and scientifically less intuitive. It recedes the mystery and terror of something otherwise uncontrollable, indecipherable, and probability based.

(e) The maneuver doctrine required relentless tempo that could not afford an operational pause. It was one of the factor leading to German failure during Barbarossa.[27]

CHAPTER IV

MANOEUVRE WARFARE FOR INDIAN ARMY

Theory Suitable For Our Nation ?

31. The answer to this most commonly asked question depends upon one's needs, assets, and the kind of political supervision. Irrespective of national or military inclinations toward any theory, there are certain parameters which determine what type of warfare a nation should adopt.

(a) Human Resource. Contrary to expectation that attrition requires a lower level of intellect and imagination than does maneuver; One must understand that most people can be made to adhere to checklists and taught

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to operate or maintain even the most complex pieces of technology.

However, maneuver warfare requires creativity and innovativeness towards the unorthodox approach and independent cast of mind.

(b) Equipment. Attrition-warfare armament must exceed at least the

quality and preferably the quantity of that of the enemy. Developing countries will find adoption or continued adherence to attrition theory unjustifiable, unless they expect even more compelled foes (only western adversary in our case).

(c) Threat. A military selecting a particular warfare theory will need to consider its likely threats. Will it encounter a conventional army with high standard of training, morale and motivation equivalent to his (west in our case) or a more resourceful nation with edge in terms of political freedom, technology, and numbers (East in our case).

(d) Duration of war. In short term conflicts attrition has not performed well against maneuveristic army. It is only after extended periods of stalemate (and frequently heavy casualties) can those who employ attrition theory could overcome their maneuveristic enemies.

(e) Risk / Higher Directions of War. The level of acceptable risk that the leadership is willing to take is extremely important when selecting a suitable theory.

(f) Strategy. If a particular nation has some territorial disputes but its strategy is to maintain a status quo, it is not going to opt for large-scale

manoeuvre warfare. However, since it has to remain prepared for any attempts to alter the status quo it may opt for a slightly higher bias towards Manoeuvre than attrition.

(g) Some of the other determinants for planned offensive could be: –

(i) How deep are we planning to go?

(ii) Is there a requirement of going that deep?

(iii) What type of punishment do we want to inflict?

(iv) What type of punishment are we anticipating?

32. Social Fiber of Society. Attrition theory generally suits the style of societies that believe human nature is inherently good; that war takes place between military forces with clearly designated combatants; that there are clear-cut demarcations and chivalry still exists during any combat. While the foundation of manoeuvre warfare is based on the philosophical tenets- that human nature is inherently flawed, that because of human greed and frailty; warfare is an inevitable fact of life, that war is an all-embracing human activity that is not confined to the clear demarcation of the battlefield and that the crux of warfare is man's mind.

Which Direction Should We Embark

33. Rarely has superior firepower and attritionist approach determined the outcome of any major conflict. Nations have historically demonstrated a remarkable resiliency while enduring the punishment wrought by bombs,

artillery, missiles and loss of men and material but victories are achieved only when the commander orchestrates a balance