

STRATEGIES OF WARFARE: CHANAKYA VS SUN TZU

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Abstract: Wars have been an important and inevitable part of world history. Attacks, Conquests, Strategies, Arms etc are aspects of war. However there are various strategies of war throughout history. My paper is an attempt to study and understand the different aspects of war strategies implemented by rulers and their associates. In this attempt I have chosen to study the strategies planned by Chanakya and Sun Tzu. Their treatises namely 'Arthashastra' and 'Art of war' display their ideas and strategies of war. Chanakya was an Indian teacher, philosopher, economist, jurist and royal advisor. He was also identified as Kautilya who authored the treatise 'Arthashastra'. He was the chief advisor and minister to the Maurya empire. Sun Tzu was a Chinese general, strategist and philosopher who lived in ancient China. He is credited as the author of 'The Art of War' which is an influential work on military strategies. The war strategies propogated by Chanakya and Sun Tzu were at different times, but these ideals are alive even in the present era. Various rulers have tried implementing their ideas according to the times. My paper is an attempt at understanding the ideals and philosophies of their war strategies.

Key words: War, Strategies, Arthashastra, Art of war, Ethics

Wars have been an important and inevitable part of world history. Violence, aggression, bloodshed have always been a part of any war. However, the main reason for war has been man's need for "power" and his need to "conquer". The outcome of any war has always been a sense of loss – assets, lives, principles, values and ethics.

Based on war there are various theories and treatises written. The theory of war more popularly known, is the Just theory of war. This is a doctrine or a tradition of war ethics understood by leaders engaged in war. This theory tries to ensure the moral justifiability of war through series of criteria which if met makes war just. The two main criteria are "right to go to war" (Jus ad bellum) and "right conduct in war" (Jus in bello). The first right deals with the morality of going to war while the second deals with the moral conduct during war. However there is also a third criteria being considered by a few (Jus post bellum) which deals with morality after war regarding victims, settlements, rehabilitation, treaties, reconstruction, etc. According to the just war theory, war though an inhuman and terrible option might be the only solution in certain given situations. Hence, responsibilities, undesirable outcomes and preventable atrocities may justify war.

There are opponents of the theory who believe that any war can never be justified. They take the pacifist stand while others are inclined towards the nationalist view point where wars are needed to serve the nation's interest. Thus the soldier who fights for the nation is nobilified and converted to a hero. The historical aspect of the just war theory deals with rules and agreements over the period of time. It also includes writings and treatises by various philosophers, leaders, etc. and examines the philosophical and ethical aspects of war and warfare.

The philosophy of war examines issues like the causes of war, the relation between war and humans and ethics of war. "On War" by Clausewitz combines observations on strategy along with human nature and purpose of war. He also examines the teleology of war: whether war is means to an end outside itself or whether it is an end in itself. He tries to conclude that war must not exist for its own sake and that it must serve a purpose for the state.

There are various treatises on the ethics and strategies of war written by thinkers and leaders across the globe. To name a few:

War and Peace – Leo Tolstoy.

Christian – Leo Tolstoy

The Art of War – Sun Tzu

Artha Shastra – Kautilya.

Philosophy of war brings us various traditions of thought which has many broad categories.

1. Teleological tradition has three more common philosophies of war which are
 - Cataclysmic – was espoused by Leo Tolstoy in his War and Peace. According to this theory war is bane on humanity serving no major purpose other than causing destruction and suffering. However it may cause a massive change to society.
 - Eschatological – which believes all wars lead to some goal and the conflict will be resolved some day which will result in a massive change in society and this new society would be free from war.
 - Political – this was the school to which Clausewitz belonged and they saw war as a tool of the state. He views war as a rational instrument of national policy.
2. Ethical tradition which has three divisions
 - Realists – they believe that the morals and ethics meant for individuals cannot be applied to societies in general and that war is to preserve the state's national interest.
 - Pacifism – believes that moral evaluation of war is possible and it will always be immoral.
 - Just war theory – unlike pacifism this theory believes war to be morally justifiable.

My paper here is focusing on two main strategists of war – Chanakya and Sun Tzu. Their treatises ArthaShastra and the Art of War respectively have influenced many states in their endeavours of conquests and system building.

Chanakya was an Indian philosopher, teacher, jurist, and royal advisor at the Mauryan Emperor's court. He is believed to have authored "ArthaShastra" an Indian treatise on Statescraft. Neeti Shastra and Neeti Sutra are also authored by him. He is basically a pioneer in the field of politics and economics. Chanakya's art of diplomacy is contemporarily practiced in the areas of defence, strategy formation and foreign relations. He was believed to be inspired from *Vidur* who was known to be the wise man in *Mahabharata* and had written '*Vidur Sanhita*' from which Chanakya Neeti is said to be derived. In India his work is considered most importantly in the field of Economics. ArthaShastra is also a treatise of policy making and military strategy. The book though translated as "science of politics" has a wider scope. It contains chapters on government, law, court systems, economics, ethics, trade, war, duties of a king, etc. The text also talks of philosophy, culture, agriculture, mineralogy, medicine, wild life etc.

The book explores various issues of social welfare, collective ethics for society, war and natural calamities, major strategies for towns and cities. Thus the book has about 5300 sentences on governance, politics, economics, hostile states, forming strategic alliances and conduct of war.

Book 7 and Book 10 of ArthaShastra deals with war which considers numerous reasons for the same. However it must be mentioned here that book 7 talks of avoiding war while book 10 speaks of strategies of war. It classifies war into – open, covert, and silent. It specifies on how to engage in these wars and to detect if one is a target of covert or silent war. The book also mentions that if the degree of progress is the same between pursuing peace and raging a war then peace is to be preferred. It also specifies the disadvantages of war, like loss, expense, etc.

Chanakya was always of the view that the state must be fortified, army always prepared for war and to defend itself during war. He was also of the view that peace is better than war as it is conducive to prosperity and security of all. The book also specifies the appropriateness of all means during war be it assassination, discord, spying, false propaganda and hostility. Chanakya's ArthaShastra is a classic on statescraft and policy making suggesting prudence, diplomacy and stressing on peace. However, it also deals with the strategies to excel in war if forced to.

Sun Tzu on the other hand was a Chinese general, philosopher, and strategist living in ancient China. He is known for authoring the "Art of War" – influential work of military strategy, affecting Western and Eastern philosophy. His work has been praised and used through East Asia. It grew in popularity and was used in Western society as well. Both Chanakya and SunTzu lived in different eras but their ideals are alive even during present times. It continues to influence Asia, Europe, and America in fields of culture, politics, business, and modern warfare.

The Art of War presents the philosophy of war for managing conflicts and winning battles. It is a masterpiece on strategy and has been cited and referred to by many generals. It has been employed by the likes of Napoleon, Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, Joseph Stalin and General Douglas MacArthur. It is also popular among leaders, in the field of business management. It includes strategies of public administration and planning. Along with battle it also advocates diplomacy, and building relations with other nations.

The military strategy of Sun Tzu has greatly influenced China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. The Art of War focuses on weaponry and strategy instead of philosophy. However his observations are applied in situations extending beyond war. Art of War is a military treatise composed of 13 chapters. Each of them deals with a distinct aspect of warfare and its application. Much of the text is about how to fight wars without going to battle. There are various tips to outsmart the opponents so that physical battle is not necessary. The book has been the subject of legal books, articles, negotiation tactics and trial strategy.

Both the treatises have various themes and areas about war which can be compared. I have come across themes like Enemy, Spies, Intrigue, Other options, Time, Resources etc. These areas have been dealt quite similarly by both the strategists in their treatises. There are quotes on the above themes which made me realize that their strategies regarding them are similar, though slight differences stand out.

I may take the liberty here to mention few examples of their quotes regarding the themes to bring across my view on their strategies.

Time

Sun Tzu – ‘if the enemy is taking his ease, give him no rest. If his forces are united, try to separate them’.

Chanakya - ‘An enemy destruction shall be brought about even at the cost of great losses in men, material and wealth’. Chanakya believed that ‘Whenever an enemy king is in trouble, and his subjects are exploited, oppressed, impoverished and disunited, he should be immediately attacked after one proclamation of war’.

Spies

Sun Tzu - ‘Be subtle! Be subtle! And use your spies for every kind of business.’ He believes that ‘We shall succeed in the long run in killing the commander-in-chief.’

Chanakya – Besides getting information, ‘Spies should be well-versed in: inciting enemy forces to revolt, spreading false rumors about the enemy, mixing poison in enemy’s food supply, poisoning their drinking water, setting fire to the enemy’s camp and bringing havoc and destruction, or if necessary, even assassinating the enemy leaders.’ He had also stated that ‘Secret agents can destroy high officers in the enemy army either with poison or with ‘love-winning medicines’.

Intrigue

Sun Tzu – ‘The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting’.

Chanakya – ‘A arrow shot by an archer may or may not kill a single person; but skillful intrigue, devised by a wise man, may kill even those who are in the womb.’ He has also quotes that ‘If the end could be achieved by non-military methods, even by methods of intrigue, duplicity and fraud, I would not advocate an armed conflict’.

Deception

Sun Tzu -He suggests ‘all warfare is based on deception’. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces; we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe that we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe that we are near.’ He also stated ‘Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected’.

Chanakya -At all times, Chanakya wanted his king to use deception, play roles, and create appearances. Why risk heavy losses or even defeat in battle if deception and assassination can weaken or even defeat the enemy? His favorite tactic in battle was to pretend to be defeated, retreat in apparent disorder, and then attack a disorganized and unsuspecting enemy. Even if a king is forced to surrender in order to survive, Chanakya wanted him to pretend that his surrender was “an excellent thing” until he was clever or strong enough to fight back.

These are a few examples stated for the purpose of comparison. My understanding of the two strategists has led me to the conclusion that both Chanakya and Sun Tzu were great military generals with tactics that could be implemented beyond war. However, Chanakya was more inclined towards peace and avoiding war while Sun Tzu though diplomatically wanting peace did not hesitate in waging war. Even with reference to the areas mentioned above, Chanakya was more moral and ethical in approach whether be it the enemy or the use of spies and deception. While Sun Tzu comes across as more aggressive in his approach towards the same. Chanakya used his spies more for information and knowing the weaknesses of his enemy rather than assassination, while Sun Tzu deployed spies primarily for assassination of his enemies. Both however believed in the tactic of a war without it being physical, rather they believed in breaking their enemy emotionally and thus avoid a physical war. Chanakya was more defensive and believed that the state must be fortified from enemy attack, while Sun Tzu was more inclined towards attack and Geurilla warfare. In reference to the theories of war – Chanakya’s ideology is Dharma oriented where ethics of war is more emphasized. Though there are areas where he might come across as a tyrant, there is always a falling back on the moral conduct during the war. He is more of a realist who believes that morals of an individual cannot be applied to the society. Sun Tzu on the other hand has always been a strategist who believes in war as a means to some end. He takes recourse to tactics of deception to overpower his opponents. He engages in asymmetric warfare with guerilla tactics which gives him the win- win situation needed.

Any country can thus pursue lessons from the writings of both Sun Tzu and Chanakya, in situations of peace and sub-conventional warfare. We can learn a number of lessons from both these strategists. However the dilemma still remains as to which thinker is better than the other. This would be a subject of one’s own priority and understanding. We should try to logically reconcile and inculcate all relevant teachings of both the leaders. Thus ArthaShastra and The Art of War are two such treatises, though dealing with war tactics and strategies are used in fields beyond war in areas of governance, sports, management studies, politics, economics, etc. The books, though written more than 1000 years ago, were much ahead of their time and hence are relevant even today.

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