



## Valour in Indian Military Novels



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#### ABSTRACT

Valour is a much-coveted virtue in any country's armed forces. However, there is a thin difference between valour and violence in acts of bravery. The literary works written by veterans about the affairs of the military give the insiders' perspectives. These fictional works differ from other writers' works about the armed forces. Because of the field's susceptible issues, the common man lacks familiarity with the working mode of the armed forces. The unique exposure and experience of Warfield and tactical and operational strategies are narrated in fictional forms in military novels. They unveil the crucial issues related to an individual, family, society and ultimately the nation. This chain

of interconnectedness can't be neglected. Otherwise, it will turn into havoc for all.

Unlike war novels, military novels deal mainly with the lives of uniformed personnel. Their challenges, the value-abiding ethics of the units, dedication to duty, and the spirit of sacrifice are awe-inspiring tales to be told to the general public. This paper ponders the inner crux of the military world through select Indian military novels written by veterans. The study aims to explore the intricacies of the virtue called valour and the importance of its application in fulfilling the assigned missions against all oddities.

#### KEYWORDS

virtue, violence, Warfield, nation, havoc.



## RESEARCH PAPER

The Indian military novels, such as the four *Lashkar* series form the basis of our analysis, are unique in their portrayal of the military lives of personnel, both in peace and on assigned missions. These novels, often written by veterans or those closely associated with military life, provide an insider's view of military culture, challenges, and its ethos. They differ from autobiographical works in that they fictionalise the events and intentionally hide the exact usage of ammunition.

The etymology of the word 'military' is from Middle English 'militari', from Old French 'militaire', from Latin 'militaris,' originating from 'miles' (soldier). This historical context is relevant to our study as it helps us understand the evolution of the concept of 'military' and its portrayal in literature. The Oxford Advanced American Dictionary defines the word 'military' (noun) as 'soldiers' or 'the armed forces.' Britannica states that the Armed forces constitute a country's combined military services, the branches dealing with land, naval, and air warfare. The Indian novels based on military plots and personnel as the central characterization are called Indian military novels. These are novels written by trained veterans of the military. The novels uncover the lesser-known world of military personnel to the readers. The discipline, ethical standards, spirit of patriotism, team spirit, military lifestyles and culture are expressed through relevant plots in these novels.

The genre of military novels differs from that of social and psychological novels in that they focus on the military environment, which includes warfare, difficult geographical areas, and demanding challenges for the fighters due to internal and external disputes and wars. The intentional blurring of the exact descriptions of weapons and their usage is a unique feature of military novels. Though the descriptions appear too technical in the novels, their fictional world exposes the harsh realities at the border and during warfare. Brave men and their companions in different military troops fight and live to protect the country's men and materials and safeguard the citizens' peaceful condition. The affairs of the military have been crucial since the dawn of civilization, as they determine the fate and peaceful existence of people and nations. The portrayal of virtuous characterisation in the literary works keeps the hope for the progressive path for mankind. But this virtue is a hard-earned path by fighting against the atrocities of life. The writers' philosophy, as well as the perceptions of life's experiences, are documented in these works. Valour, one of the essential virtues explored in these novels, is a quality that saved the spirit and the confidence of mankind. In the context of these Indian military novels, valour is about physical courage, moral strength, and resilience in the face of adversity. It is a central theme in our analysis as we seek to understand its role in altering the fate of characters in these military novels. This study aims to understand the changing connotation of the meaning of valour in the military as well as in the civilian world. It also differentiates the etymological differences between 'valour', 'courage', 'bravery', and 'heroism'.

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The scope of military literature is immense in the present world. Because the total world defense population is more than ten million. The military budget expenditure of every country has been growing in recent years due to the Russia-Ukraine war and global terrorist activities and threats. The armed forces select people who are physically and mentally fit to be trained to serve in the military so as to study their affairs and explore the contemporary challenges and ways to eradicate situations like war, as it will create collateral damage to all. So, the military is striving to avoid any possible conflict, combat leading to significant warfare, which will include atomic weapons like that in the Second World War. Thus, the ultimate goal of a military unit, in the words of the Chinese general and strategist Sun Tzu (500 BC) in *The Art of War*, is to avoid war and maintain peace.

The differences between a military and a war novel lie in their treatment of the plot. The military novel is all about the affairs of the soldiers, with details of arms and ammunition. It upheld the role of veterans in providing safety and security against enemies during conflicts and armed attacks and against natural threats during peacetime. In contrast, the war novel portrays only the war scenario, with all its negative impact on humanity, the suffering and the gloomy fate of destruction. The Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz's famous dictum, says that war is an extension of policy. So, there is a need to highlight the innate differences between these two genres of literature. In a journal article on "The Military Novel", Josiah Bunting III uses both terms as synonyms:

This essay is about military fiction, about 'war novels.' Jan Angstrom and J.J.Widen have noted the need to differentiate between the two in their book *Contemporary Military Theory*: "Even during peace, war and the shadow of future war permeate many, if not all, societies." So, military affairs, leadership and strategies are crucial before the culmination of the war, and these aspects are covered in military novels. Studying concepts, patterns, military activities, and doctrines will help us to distinguish between war and military novels.

Modern Indian military history starts with its link with the British army since the colonised period. The dedicated and selfless service of Indian soldiers contributed much to India's freedom in 1947. The Indian National Army of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose developed good links with German forces, which influenced the radical movements of freedom struggle. The global scenario of the Indian army is explained further by the veteran Manohar Malgonkar, the pioneer of Indian military novels, and his novels expose the role of the Indian military. This study has chosen four books of the Lashkar series by Mukul Deva, which captured the essence of the contemporary situation, with data for analysis from all three wings of the armed forces.

Since the dawn of civilisation, man has struggled to establish himself safe and secure, first from the harsh natural forces and then from the threats of his counterparts. To resist the opposition, he has to be vigilant and take the assistance of his fellow mates in more organised threats. To deal with the various types of threats, he started to train himself and his kith and kin, even using varied weapons of protection. Thus, whenever man was involved in conflicts, battles, or wars, he enjoyed victory or failure and learned various lessons from the loss of men and materials. The defence complex also fired their psychological impulses. The early tribes considered war to be a holy ritual. So, bellicosity persisted in our timeline as it also threw off the conditioning of average men.

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The gradual technical advancements supported man's safety from fierce natural and human-induced hazards. However, defeating his enemies and establishing himself as successful was challenging. The great Sumerian king of the early dynastic period, Gilgamesh, says, "Hold my hand in yours, and we will not fear what hands like ours can do." The primitive man realised that single-handed combat could not win the race. To face challenging situations, he has learnt to develop strong willpower, courage to face difficulties and internal resolution. So, the bonds with the kith and kin took a new dimension. The team spirit and emotional bonds with his fellow men enhanced to overcome battlefield trauma.

The past proved the undeterred faith in the power of a group, provided an able and efficient leader will lead it. Literature reflected life, and many volumes were written to praise the leader, his valourous quality, and his fearlessness in the face of danger and death. In Vedic literature, he is known as 'senani.' The Indian epic, *Ramayana* by Valmiki, hails Rama as the epitome of perfection and a brave warrior. The following generations carried in their psyche the lessons of warfare over the ages and the threat of enemies. They recorded their expressions in figures and art forms and later through writing.

The written records provide a graph of man's adaptability to various challenges he faced for generations. He had been inventing new methods and techniques to win the day, survive and succeed. So, literary works provide the needed guise to record and highlight the turmoil faced by humanity. The literature written by the veterans captured the spirit of victory, valour and lessons of life more than any other genre of literature. Military literature is not only an action thriller because the narration is down to earth. "...in a gunfight, it is generally the guy with the bigger weapon who wins." (*Salim Must Die*, 2009) This genre of literature didn't take an anti-human or anti-life stance. The writer of the Iqbal saga, Mukul Deva, an ex-army personnel, says in the preface of the second novel, *Salim Must Die*:

Hundreds of apparently unrelated and seemingly trivial events brought the human race to the brink of disaster. (156)

The present Ukraine and Russian war and the careless destruction of men and materials prove the need to learn the lessons. The post-wars and post-modern world have their own challenges to mankind. The endless, aimless terrorism is a new bothering of the whole world, and it has become a universal concern. The importance of defence is undoubtedly inevitable in any small country around the globe. Defence personnel are trained with weapons, strategy, operational tactics, undeterred faith, and valour. The conflict or the battle, if curbed at the initial stage, will save many lives in future. So, the victorious end proves the righteousness of the path. America's sixth President, John Quincy Adams, helped his country by avoiding war with France during his tenure from 1825-1829. However, he also opines that "Warfare, however, is not all about fighting but also its avoidance." Sun Tzu, the Chinese Strategist, proclaimed:

"The finest battle is one that is won without having been fought." (*The Art of War*, 9)

The veterans, armed personnel or the soldiers who protect and safeguard the nation exhibit the militant spirit. As in the Collins English Dictionary, a militant believes in something strongly and actively brings change, often in extreme ways that others find unacceptable. A militant is a radical, ready and willing to fight for a cause. He can be a hostile and aggressive individual. So, the delicate, thin line that demarcates between the good's aggression and the narrow, selfish



cause will identify the positivity or relative evil in any militant spirit. The origin and development of the positive virtue or quality, valour, was not accidental in a person's personality. Birth, parentage, influences of society, environment, and ultimately suitable training offer their due contribution in achieving this desired goal. In Greek mythology, Prometheus is a Titan god of fire. He is best known for defying the gods by stealing fire from them and giving it to humanity through technology, knowledge and civilisation. Thus, he proved to be a person of valour for humanity but not for the other gods. So, the purpose behind any act determines and validates its authenticity as a valorous act. This study aims to trace the changing connotations of valour over a period of time and also to find the uniqueness of valour in the Indian context. This research also intends to know the crucial role of valour in attaining the mission's goal, along with pro-human and pro-life consciousness. The scope of this research is to cover the essence of twenty-first-century Indian military literature, with a particular focus on military novels. As true art reflects actual life with aesthetic fervour, the untold truths can be grasped, written in the guise of fictional narratives of veterans.

F.W.Bain, a British writer, said in 1908, "India, a withered trunk...suddenly shot out with foreign foliage." This pre-occupied, prejudiced notion limits the great valourous saga of Indian heritage. So, tracing the lineage of courage, valour and self-esteem of Indians from pre-historic times to the present post-war age is the outline of this study.

'The Military' means all the defence forces of nations, including the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Marine Guard, engaged in safeguarding their citizens and nation during peace and wartime. A military novel explores the diverse experiences of officers and soldiers through interwoven events in a military setting. The study has selected four representative military novels of the twenty-first century written by Indian veteran: the four Lashkar series of Mukul Deva, Lashkar (2008), Salim Must Die (2009), Blowback (2010), and Tanzeem (2011).

Mukul Deva is an Ex-army personnel who served fifteen years in the Sikh Light Infantry. After fifteen years of service as a Major in the Indian Army, in active combat duty and various operations in India and overseas, he opted for premature retirement and penned ten novels. An alumnus of La Martiniere College, Lucknow, the National Defence Academy, Pune and the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, Mukul Deva was commissioned in December 1981. Indian military literature is a recent development, after independence. But even before the Independence, our courageous soldiers and officers fought for the British army. One among them is Manohar Malgonkar (1913-2010). He studied at the University of Mumbai, and his maternal grandfather was a governor of Gwalior state. After graduating, he joined the Army and became Lieutenant Colonel in the Maratha Light Infantry. The Indian socio-historical milieu was the backdrop of his novels. Apart from novels, he also wrote non-fiction, biography and history. He was a columnist in "The Statesman" and "The Deccan Herald". As a short story writer, he has published ten collections of short stories. His novels are as follows: *The Sea Hawk: Life and Battle of Kanhoji Angrey*(1959), *Distant Drums* (1960), *The Combat of Shadows*(1962), *The Princes*(1963), *A Bend in the Ganges*(1964), *Spy in Amber*(1971), *The Devil's Wind*(1972), *Salimar*(1978), *Bandicoot Run*(1982). In all the fictional military novels, Manohar Malgonkar had definite views on Indian cultural heritage and politics. *Distant Drum*





and *Devil's Wind* were exceptional in their treatment of the sordid life of the poor. M.K.Naik says,

“Unlike Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar is a realist who believes that art has no purpose to serve except pure entertainment.” (M.K. Naik,54)

Though the focus of expression is to entertain, the writer, Manohar Malgonkar, observes a few unique ideologies typical of an officer. He does not believe in non-violence. As Paul C. Verghese has said, his works are exotic and melodramatic. The critic Richard Church compares *A Bend in the Ganges* with *War and Peace* of Tolstoy in his review of the book *The Bookman*. E.M. Foster considers *A Bend in the Ganges* one of the three best novels of 1964. John P. Marquand, a great American novelist, influences his narration style. His novel, *The Princes*, was second in the New York Times and Bear in Mind lists.

Indian literature in English has been dealing with multi-dimensional aspects of Indian life, i.e., attaining advancement with rural roots, spiritual and material prosperity, socio-political issues, agrarian values, economic and fiscal dilemmas, women's voices, modern-day complexities of hybrid existence, etc., Indian culture typically involves creative writing in various genres. The Indian writing about the military in the post-independence era is a recent development that has been going on for only a few decades.

A war novel is one in which the primary action takes place on the battlefield or in a civilian setting, where the characters are preoccupied with the issues of war. Many war novels are historical novels, which are also written by non-military personnel. A war novel differs from military fiction. A military novel need not include war as the central theme; it revolves around the actions of military personnel who are occupied in all the parades of everyday life. The setting involves in and around the battlefield and the units. A military novel is a creative, fictional narrative written by military personnel and by those closely related to the military on the issues of battle, military culture, foresight about wars, destructions and the related plight of human society. The authorship in military novels is that of an insider of the military setup and organisation. The first-hand information credits the works with authenticity and challenges the writers' craftsmanship. As the novels should not disclose the factual affairs of the military with exact technical details, they require a forced and intentional blend of fiction in their narratives. Compared to non-military writers, insiders can comprehend firsthand information about the crucial issues involved in combat. The culture of the military organisation trains the military personnel to be upright in their values, and ethical standards must be maintained throughout their careers and life. The courage they have to exhibit during peace and war brings out the essentials of veterans' moral and physical courage.

Indian army is only two hundred and fifty years old. Only fifty years ago, it began to be led entirely by Indians. Military service is required everywhere during emergencies and natural calamities, but a soldier's human face is rarely observed. To be courageous, a soldier puts higher principles of the unit ahead of his own needs and the opportunities for survival. The stance taken during the duties explains the military's most extraordinary successes or failures. The writings of the military personnel bring out the human face behind the military facade. The growing distance between the soldier and the common man aggravates the gap in



understanding. The novels try to bridge this gap in their unique style of representing the grave circumstances in which they must work for the safety and the security of the nation and the civilians. The glory or the glaring pitfalls of the military makes or mars the future of any country.

The four sequels, *Lashkar*, *Salim Must Die*, *Blowback* and *Tanzeem*, have the courageous delineation of man's conscious effort for the right doing. The enemy front with massive and collateral damage capabilities could be curtailed by the sheer power of valour and induced disturbance in the enemy's area. The exploitation of men and materials through the narrow yardsticks of religion, region and border was curtailed by Force 22, the collective task force of the Indian military.

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