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**BATTLE OF NARRATIVES: THE NEW FORM OF  
WARFARE  
BY  
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**ORGANISED BY CENJOWS  
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**BATTLE OF NARRATIVES: THE NEW FORM OF WARFARE**  
**BY LT GEN D P PANDEY PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (RETD)**  
**ORGANISED BY CENJOWS ON 06<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2025**

The Battle of Narratives is an age-old form of contestation to defeat fear and enemies and to keep confidants, friends, neutrals and partners on their side with the weaving of stories, right or wrong. Ramayana, and its protagonist Rama, is the ultimate form of Narrative and is often debated to keep order in the society of India by identifying and preaching the values of goodness in human beings and the win over the evil forces that don't follow the norms of the society.

Battle of Narratives was always relevant and practised even a few millenniums back, and the same is proved by the articulation of Chanakya in Artha Shastra in 375-283BCE," An arrow shot by an archer may or may not kill a single person; but skilful intrigue, devised by a wise man, may kill even those who are in the womb." Information warfare, of which narratives are a central part, was his preferred option to win wars without fighting. Similarly, Sun Tzu also stated a few centuries earlier than Chanakya that 'The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.'

However, in the contemporary world, non-kinetic warfare is rapidly replacing kinetic and physical force-driven warfare. And in this, the centrality of information that rides all domains cannot be understated. The Battle of Narratives is a key operational element wherein the targets are not only the direct competitors but the allies and neutrals as well. The jus ad bellum has never been so important and wins and losses are measured in terms of success and failure in shaping the narrative. The importance of the battle of narratives is that it is being contested at all times, during the entire spectrum from peace to war and has relevance in all the elements of the State power, i.e. Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic.

The simple definition of narrative is "A narrative is a story that you write or tell to someone, usually in great detail. A narrative can be a work of poetry or prose or even song, theatre, or dance. Often, a narrative is meant to include the "whole story."

Narratives can be either factual or fictional. In either case, narratives should emotionally engage. No one has seen their respective Gods but believes through the narratives told over the ages.

In the real world, the truth or falsehood of the story doesn't matter. What is important is how many times it has been repeated, how convincing it is, and whether it has fragments of truth or is deemed to be truth or unrelated elements of truth. If repeated multiple times, a donkey can believe it is a tiger, and the same vice versa.

A "battle of narratives" refers to a situation where different competing stories or interpretations of events are being presented and actively promoted, often in a public sphere, to influence public opinion and shape the understanding of a situation to favour one perspective over another; essentially, a fight to control the narrative around a topic through communication strategies.

The three best practitioners of exploiting the power of Narratives are:

- Religion, the opium of the masses through selling miracles and life in the afterlife that no one has seen. It is most dangerous as millions have killed and been killed by being sold the narratives peddled by ill-educated but articulate religious leaders across faiths.
- Businesses, as they need to survive the cut-throat world of competition. They can convince grownups and educated to change behaviours where all logic or medical science fails. Cognizant of the dangers of products consumers continue to use based on the shaping of narrative by advertisements that are target-oriented and scientifically researched.
- Politics, as it is a matter of enduring survival and the narrative sold of an equitable society, is peddled in different forms to a gullible population, whereas the intention of politics is power and money.

Narratives matter and have consequences, as in the case of the ongoing state in Bangladesh. Narrative wars play a crucial role in the ongoing conflicts of Israel-Hamas, Ukraine-Russia, the revival of ISIS in Syria, the enduring nature of Al Qaeda and the spread of its ideology in Africa and also in the modern and developed world.

Technology and the digital age have made narrative peddling easier by touching and influencing people in the remotest recesses of the world. The best practitioners of Narrative warfare are the non-state actors who evolve consistently based on technology and the geopolitical environment. They are responsive and exploit emerging vulnerabilities in any part of the world to peddle narratives.

Patience and persistence are crucial in the battle of narratives—an unavoidable necessity. The ultimate narratives shape the mindset of individuals, such as when a common person accepts their fate and embraces the idea of welcoming the future in the other world to blow up as a suicide bomber. India lacks a cohesive structure and strategy for narrative warfare. Meanwhile, global leaders and neighbouring nations have already become adept at mastering these tactics. We must plan to have structured responses for the National Narrative Building though the operators should be unstructured.