

## **INDIAN ARMY AMONG THE BEST IN THE WORLD**

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Recently there have been some incidents involving our Army personnel that have no doubt sullied the fair name of the organisation. It is not intended here to defend these incidents not to put up an alibi for such happenings but only to present them as aberrations that could occur even among the best. While it should be most flattering for the Indian Army to be treated in the country as the “holy cow”, this carries with it very high expectations bordering on the impossible, i.e. cent per cent perfection from every combatant enrolled. Consequently, even one odd individual case of dishonesty and lack of integrity causes extreme disappointment and worry to the people over the state of the Army. This would appear rather unfair considering the fact that the national character of the people who expect so much from their Army, cannot itself be rated too high. It must be appreciated that the Army is raised from the people and the character level in the Army is bound to be related to the character level of the nation as a whole. What is surprising, therefore, is not that there have been some cases of dishonesty and moral degradation in the Army, but that there have been so few even while the whole nation is seething in corruption.

Hardly anyone, even among those who charge the Army with falling moral standards, would deny that these standards still remain to be much higher than the general level of our national character. One reason for this could be that opportunities for corruption in the Army are less. But this could not be the only or the main reason. Even in Pakistan the moral standard of its army, which is deeply involved in politics and civil administration, is believed to be still generally higher than that of that country as a whole. The fact of the matter is that, as the job of the soldier involves the higher ideals of sacrifice and self-denial, motivation and indoctrination towards this end forms part of his training curriculum. Every effort is made to instil in the soldier a high degree of self-respect, unfaltering dedication and a deep sense of honour, which enable him to make the supreme sacrifice of his life for a higher cause. The indoctrination takes the form of glorification of his martial heritage and tradition established through deeds of valour in the past. Consequently he stands out in society as a class by himself – still bound by higher values, notwithstanding the tugs and pulls of mundane considerations exercised by his environment. It must be remembered that no other institution or organisation in the country lays so much stress on moral values during the training of its cadre as the Army does. Indeed the Army does this not purely out of philanthropic or altruistic reasons but as a compulsion borne out of necessity in keeping with its tasks.

One cannot, however, expect success rate of such efforts to be hundred percent. Perfection may be an ideal to aim at, but it is hardly attainable in practical terms. The net result of Army's efforts cannot, therefore, be but in terms of percentages. A hypothetical figure of seventy five percent of dedicated personnel in the Army of a country that cannot, perhaps, boast of more than twenty five percent of such people in other spheres of life, should be considered as good. The actual, however, indisputably stands much above this figure. So why this hullabaloo about falling Army standards?

Evidently, while standards in the Army have remained the same as ever, they only appear to have fallen. There are a number of reasons for this. The main reason being that the Army is today much larger than it was, say, forty years back. Consequently if one percent cases of sub standard behaviour in one year worked out to 200 then, it would work out to 1000 today. While 1000 cases appear to be very large figure, enough to shock a nation – the percentage of bad fish

in the Army remains the same as it was more than four and half decades back. Besides, while in the past the Army remained well quarantined against media gaze and hardly any such case came up for public scrutiny, today, with the Army heading towards total transparency, every case gets reported, making the number of such cases look more atrocious than it actually is. Ironically though the unkindest cut in this regard would appear to come from the ex-servicemen themselves. It seems that any talk among them the ex-servicemen invariably veers round to the falling standards in the Army. While it may generally be due to the tendency of the older lot to brag about their “good old days”, it is, at times, borne out of some grudge that the ex0servicemen may be carrying against the army for wrongs suffered by them while in service. This is particularly true of the officer class. Unfortunately, with the pyramid type of rank structure that we have in the Army, every officer – except the one who makes it to the appointment of the Chief of the Army Staff – has to face supersession at one stage or the other stage of his career. Even though inevitable, most retired officers come back home unhappy with the Army over their supersession. While the system of selection for the next rank in the Army is, perhaps, the best known, it is not – and cannot be – flawless. There are, therefore, quite a few officers who get wrongfully superseded purely due to system failure and may seek retirement under genuine feelings of disgust. The selection is, nevertheless, generally fair. However, as very few would ever concede that they deserved to be superseded, even if they did, “falling standards” in the Army is put out by most retired officers as a convenient alibi for their supersession. This is quickly lapped up by their not too knowledgeable friends and thus word goes round that the standards in the Army are falling.

The Indian Army has often been criticised for human rights violations during counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir. In this connection it has to be understood that maligning the Army by making false accusations of human rights violations against it or exploiting minor cases that could occur among the finest troops, forms part of an established and recognised strategy of insurgency. The way to judge the Indian Army would be to compare its conduct with that of other armies of the world engaged in a similar task and operating under similar circumstances. An opportunity for making a direct comparison was provided by the counter-insurgency operations in Somalia conducted by the UN force of which a contingent from the Indian army formed part. While authoritative reports revealed shocking cold-blooded atrocities against children, women and prisoners by Canadian, Belgian and Italian troops wearing the blue berets, the Pakistanis were reported to have gone berserk against innocent locals in retaliation to the killing of some of their men by the insurgents. In great contrast, the Indian soldiers, while dealing firmly with the insurgents, are reported to have made the greatest effort towards winning over the hearts of innocent populace through *sadhbhavana* type of programmes carried out in the areas of their responsibility. Though not much highlighted by the media, the local Somalian people wrote an unofficial but emotional letter to the Prime Minister of India praising the human approach of the Indian troops and, in their innocence, imploring him not to withdraw the Indian troops from Somalia. It is also not generally known that when the UN decided to pull out of Somalia, the contingents of all countries, other than of India, succumbed to the threat of the insurgents and surrendered their arms and equipment to them if only to buy a safe passage out of Somalia. But the proud Indian soldiers rather than surrender their weapons and equipment decided to fight their way out of Somalia and were thus able to bring back every item of the equipment that they had carried with them on induction.

The Indian Army has delivered magnificently on every occasion that it has been called upon to do so. This would not have been possible if its moral standards had been falling. The Indian Army is, indeed, still among the best in the world.