

THE WIND OF CHANGE

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Two hundred years of colonial rule ended in India 25 years ago, bringing in its wake the start of a great social revolution. The revolution may have so far achieved little by way of actually bringing about social equality and ensuring justice, but it certainly has created an awakening among the masses. The masses today are articulate and have begun to demand a say in all matters concerning the nation.

Although the Indian Army (the major component of the armed forces in India) is strictly speaking not totally mass based, since entry is restricted, voluntarily though, to certain sections of the masses, the Indian armed forces in general may be termed as mass-based. The Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy draw for their manpower on all sections of the masses. The impact of the socio-economic change is, therefore, maximum on these two Services. In the case of the Army, martial heredity, tradition, illiteracy and poverty of sections of the masses on which the army draws for its manpower, have somewhat diminished the impact to the change. There has, however, been a change all the same; appreciable enough to be reckoned with.

Change is a law of nature and, therefore, should be, as a matter of rule, healthy. However any sudden change which goes against the nature of things may not always be for the good. The change in India has been sudden and, consequently, not exactly ideal. The masses have certainly been awakened to assert their rights and privileges but few understand their responsibilities. This is the only sad aspect of the socio-economic revolution that has come about in India.

Now how does this change affect the armed forces? The armed forces have of necessity to be run in an authoritarian manner to sustain discipline and to facilitate smooth functioning. For this officers at various levels are vested with summary powers which go against democratic norms. The reason why a soldier is denied his democratic rights are as under: -

- (a) Military tasks are tasks of great importance which may involve questions of life and death not only of individuals but of the entire nation. Orders are, therefore, required to be obeyed promptly, unflinching and implicitly. This leaves little scope for democratic graces like debate, argument or questioning of propriety of orders; either because there may not be enough time for explanations or the lower echelons may not be knowledgeable enough to grasp the significance of the higher aim.
- (b) Needs of discipline can be met only when the defaulter is brought to book with speed and is not permitted to wriggle out of the clutches of law either by creating a fog of doubt or by haggling through interpretations of law.
- (c) Security of information, an aspect vital for the survival of the soldier, demands that the freedom of expression of a soldier, who may well become the source of leakage, is curbed.

However strong the wind of change may, therefore, blow over the rest of the country, the soldier cannot expect to enjoy the freedom that his civilian counterpart enjoys. No wonder that our democratic government has done nothing to disturb the old law and traditions in the armed forces. So those in command of troops who feel that democracy has adversely affected the discipline in the armed forces have nobody but themselves to blame.

This does not, however, make the armed forces totally authoritarian. An element of democracy should always be there. Although the armed forces function machine-like, they

comprise of humans who have a mind besides the body. Within limits the questioning mind has to be satiated to get the best from the body. This aspect was, perhaps, ignored (or was it avoided) in the past. It was then considered blasphemous to question 'why', however stupid the orders. The present day Jawan wants to know 'why' both regards the higher policy and the lower implementation. The British did not want the Jawans to know the 'why' to prevent them from seeing through their aims which went against the interests of our country. But today by knowing the 'why' the Jawan may feel better motivated. There is really nothing new in the concept of officers taking the men into confidence. General Sovorov had laid it down in his famous doctrine years back in the following words: -

“Every private soldier has a share in the commander’s plan and must understand it – ultimately he and his commander are one”.

All this has, of course, to be within limits. Too much reasoning may create more doubts than could be removed. Another way of satisfying a questioning mind would be for the leader to win over the faith of the men to such an extent that they have no need to question him.

EFFECTS ON LEADERSHIP

Tradition and discipline are today fighting hard to keep any change away from the armed forces. Still much change has seeped through. This is by and large considered harmful by most members of the armed forces; especially the older lot who have never ending tales of the British era to tell. They speak longingly of the days when there was no questioning, no arguments and there were such wonderful things as “a young officer being seen and not heard”; when the troops were dumb mute animals who willingly allowed themselves to be driven. All this had made leadership very simple; and fascinating too with plenty of time for the officer to play golf and indulge in other social activity. These officers are naturally sore about the changed times which demand much more from them as leaders than they were accustomed to give in the past.

A CHALLENGE

The changed times of today have, indeed, posed a great challenge to leadership at all levels of command. Leadership can no longer be taken for granted by mere virtue of rank and appointment. It entails influencing those under command by combined effects of the force of personality, reason, persuasion and personal example of the leader rather than the use of authority. Every leader has now to work for it. The leader must accept the challenge and live up to the changed times rather than sulk over it. Any sagging of discipline in troops, if there is at all, is the result of bad leadership rather than the effect of the wind of change. Some of the aspects of leadership and officer-men relationship that require re-thinking under the present context are as follows: -

- (a) Loyalty
- (b) Social equality
- (c) Maintaining distance
- (d) Rights and privileges
- (e) Sense of responsibility
- (f) The Spartan out look

Loyalty

Strictly speaking it would not be correct to say that there has been a change in the concept of loyalty as such. It would be more appropriate to say that there existed a misconception about loyalty as a result of slave mentality in the past which is now fast disappearing and loyalty is beginning to take the meaning that it should. It no longer means the famous Indian master-servant relationship. There is no worship of the person of the senior involved now; where in all his deeds private or official, good or bad were beyond reproach of his subordinate. Loyalty today is taking the dignified form of subordinating all other loyalties to the one for the country, the armed forces and to one's duty. In the process loyalty to one's superiors becomes necessary but the difference lies in where the emphasis is laid. As to how the loyalty for one's superiors should be subordinated to the loyalty to one's duty is illustrated by the following quotation from Lieutenant General FS Toker: -

“It would be nearer truth to say that only he can command who has the courage to disobey.....Into the word self control must be read the knowledge of his profession which enables him to disobey with a certainty that disobedience is not merely for the sake of itself or to further his own ambition but for the good of all” (*Approach to Battle* by Lieutenant General FS Toker)

The loyalty of the subordinate for his superior cannot, therefore, now be taken for granted. The superior officer must earn it through sincerity, affection and above all, reciprocal loyalty towards his men. For loyalty begets loyalty.

Social Equality

There is no denying the fact that the nation is today moving slowly but steadily towards a classless society aiming at social equality. What is pertinent for the armed forces is that the men no longer fear the officer in the way they used to. They are now more free with the officer and speak out their mind more freely. This has given a new dimension to leadership in the armed forces.

Apart from the general wind of change blowing in social equality, it is also now not necessary for the officer to belong to the class of people that was considered the higher strata of society; the affluent class who believed leadership to be their birth-right. People from this class, in fact, automatically became leaders and were accepted by the men as such. With the commission prospects now open to all and sundry, a large number of officers today come from the same social strata as the men they command. The modern leader has, therefore, to rise against the back drop of feelings of those of his men who are as much educated as he is, and believe that with a little more luck they too could have been officers. Such leaders have neither the white skin nor the strength of a higher social background to be accepted as leaders automatically by their men. Getting commission in the armed forces does not now appear difficult and it no longer evokes admiration of others. To win their admiration and respect the only way left for the officer is to possess the true qualities of a leader, such as sacrifice, self discipline and professional efficiency. There are no more any short cuts to leadership.

Maintaining Distance

The old time officer was very particular about maintaining distance from his men. Times have changed and there is no place for maintaining of such distances today. Apart from the general trend for social equality, the correct form of leadership expects the leader to be a *de facto* friend, philosopher and guide of his men. He must, therefore, mix freely with the men and encourage them to speak out their mind and be able to answer their questions.

Rights and Privileges

The soldier has started asserting his rights. There are signs that he has even begun to challenge the privileges of the officers. On the face of it this too is a healthy change. After all why should the men not get their rights and why should an officer enjoy privileges which he is not entitled to. The basis of discipline is justice; and justice demands that the men must be given their rights. They must be given their due not as a matter of their right but as a matter of the officer's duty. Giving the men their rights in no way prevents the officer from ensuring that they perform their duties.

There is no reason why the men should grudge the officers' privileges. Even in communist countries officers enjoy privileges which the men do not. The officer has to be given privileges for a number of reasons. There are privileges that go with his rank and appointment for improved efficiency. There are others that help him to maintain his dignity in keeping with his status and there are some privileges that are necessary for motivating the best among the youth to join the armed forces. But justice demands that privileges are real privileges and not forcibly coined by the officer for self advantage just because he is in a position to do so by virtue of his authority. The men would be quite justified in challenging such self created privileges.

Sense of Responsibility

One redeeming factor about the change that has come about is the increased sense of responsibility among all ranks. This change is, however, not always fully exploited. The sense of responsibility of juniors is often marred by the senior constantly curbing the junior's enthusiasm, initiative, drive and originality under the fear of making mistakes and having to take the rap for them. Repeatedly doubting the subordinate's sense of responsibility starts a vicious circle in which the senior's mistrust of the junior makes the junior less responsible; forcing the senior to distrust the junior even to a greater extent. This equally applies to the officer-man relationship. The men today do not have to be driven as in the past. The soldier has a "share in the commander's plan and must understand it; ultimately he and the commander are one" (the Sovorov doctrine). It is impossible that the men will let their commander down if he puts faith in their sense of responsibility. In any case it is the duty of the commanders to instil in their men a high sense of responsibility for producing better results.

Spartan Outlook

Enunciating his doctrine Sovorov has said that "hard living and a Spartan out look make good soldiers". However, Spartan living and Spartan outlook become difficult with rising economic prosperity. That is probably why Napoleon has said that "poverty privation and want are the greatest schools of soldiering". Although we are yet far away from that stage of economic prosperity when it would be difficult to get good soldiers, the problem has already started raising its head. Due to the more comfortable life that an average Indian lives in civilian life, the present day soldier has also become soft like his civilian counterpart who is living a comfortable life. Comfort is a relative term and one is comfortable or uncomfortable according to what standard of comfort one lays down for oneself. The lower the standard of comfort the more comfortable one would always be. This is the basis on which the Spartan life is advocated for the soldier – not to make him uncomfortable but to make him feel comfortable even in adverse conditions.

Whatever views one may have on comfort, there can be no difference of opinion as regards the effects of fashion on the armed forces. Nobody minds a soldier trying to look smart provided he does not lose his manliness in trying to do so. The current hippy trend among the youth of the country is beginning to show itself in the armed forces also. Girlish hair-styles with locks of hair delicately positioned on the forehead, facial make ups, manicured hands and high

heel shoes, though only practiced by a small minority in the armed forces, are egregiously visible. This is the most unhealthy trend and must be nipped in the bud by the officer.

MOTIVATION

In the past belonging to a particular community was sufficient motive for the soldier to fight and give his all. To motivate him further he was given preferential treatment and a high status in society. The former has changed little but the latter very much, notwithstanding of course the ovation that the soldier is wont to get during actual war or even perhaps a little after cease-fire. Employment in the armed forces is not governed by the demand and supply rule of economics for determining their pay and motivation. Pay may motivate a soldier to join the armed forces but it cannot motivate him much to fight. Why would then a guerrilla fight when he gets little or no pay? Even the fact that there is no dearth of recruits for the armed forces is no indication that our soldier is rightly motivated to join the armed forces; not with such acute unemployment in the country.

With the present trend of decrying martial races and the martial races themselves gradually realising that other jobs are more profitable than service in the armed forces, the only motive of heredity and prestige urging the soldier to join the armed forces is fast losing appeal. There is, therefore, an urgent need to motivate the soldier in ways other than those losing appeal with the change of time.

The strongest motive that could urge the soldier to fight is his sense of patriotism and nationalism. There can indeed be little doubt regarding that, but it would be wrong to think that nationalism among the soldiers can be taken as granted. The present day soldier has a questioning mind and wants to be convinced before accepting anything. He must, therefore, be trained mentally to stand up to anti-national forces. He has, in other words, to be politically motivated. He must know what he is fighting for and then only will he fight with vehemence. The onus for motivating the men thus lies on the officer class.

Even when politically motivated the soldier will need other motivation to make him sacrifice his life for the nation. He will need to be assured:

- (a) a reasonable standard of living;
- (b) that his position of being chained in discipline is not exploited by any one;
- (c) that his profession is treated with respect;
- (d) that while he is sacrificing for his country those behind him are also doing his bit; and
- (e) that there is somebody to look after his family while he is fighting on the front.

The onus for providing these motivating assurances lies on the society and the nation.

CONCLUSION

The socio-economic change that has come about in the nation was inevitable with the coming of freedom. It is a change that behoves a free nation. However the change has been sudden and, therefore, not without its drawbacks; the biggest being that, whereas in a free nation rights and responsibilities should go side by side, in our country the awareness of the nation to responsibilities could not keep pace with the speed with which came the awareness of rights.

Tradition and discipline have fought hard to keep the change away from the armed forces but even then much change has seeped in which was but natural. There is nothing to worry about this change as far as discipline in the armed forces is concerned. It cannot effect the discipline of our armed forces any more than it has in other free countries of the world. It has, however, added

a new dimension to leadership and officer-man relationship. The officer can no longer take his leadership for granted by virtue of his rank and appointment. He has now to earn it by displaying the true qualities of a leader. He must keep pace with the times but ensure that he does not run ahead of it. It is as bad to run ahead of time as it is to lag behind it.

One alarming aspect of this change seems to be the weakening of the motivating factors. It is very surprising that motivation in the armed forces should have diminished after independence. The British needed the armed forces to preserve imperialism. The free nation needs them today to preserve freedom. Nationalism and patriotism which should serve as a good motivation for the soldier to fight cannot be totally taken for granted. Nationalism today does not have the same simple meaning as given in our religion. The complete meaning has today been confused by numerous political terms like, neo-colonialism, internationalism, reactionaries, revisionists etc floating around.

In the armed forces, the soldier needs to be politically educated to know what he is fighting for. Above all he must get his biggest motivation from the nation in that his profession must be treated as noblest of all.