

"Towards A Better Resettled Life"

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SYNOPSIS

THERE has been a greater thinking on the resettlement of ex-service officers. This continues to attract the attention of all the right-minded people as the gap between the requirements and achievements in the resettlement of officers has been widening at a very alarming rate. This Himalayan problem requires Herculean efforts to be encountered with so to achieve atleast a satisfactory solution.

The existing differences in the resettlement opportunities available to the officers of the various arms/services by virtue of their service background keep one section of them at an edge over the others. A considerable percentage of ex-service officers are not happy with what the Army has provided them for better and faster resettlement. Most of them retire at the age of 50 years a time when the family burdens may be the maximum requiring early attention which is earlier than that of their counterparts in the civil life. Many remain unemployed or under-employed after they retire. Their life in civvies has been a "Not-so-happy" one compared to that in uniform. A drastic difference does exist; the life in uniform taking an edge over the other. A great deal has to be done to reduce the suffering of these noble figures who gave all theirs for their home, land and are not able to get in turn atleast a fraction of their requirements. If the situation is allowed to continue for long, it is bound to have unwanted effects on the morale of service officers. The prestige of the Army profession in the eyes of the nation may also reduce to a very low limit which in turn will further adversely influence the entry of already-reluctant youth into the Army as officer trainees.

This paper makes an attempt to suggest various measures for initiation of plans aimed for better resettlement. While so doing, this mainly speaks for those retiring earlier. For obvious reasons, the AMC, ADC and the SSRC officers are kept out of the purview of this paper.

TWO SIDED PROBLEM

This problem of the resettlement of ex-service officers can better be studied once the officer cadre is broadly divided into two

categories, firstly those from the non-technical arms who mostly do not possess a technical qualification/experience and secondly those from the technical arms (like Engineer, EME, Signals) who are either technically qualified at the time of entry (technical graduates) or become so during their service. The problems, its severity and possible solutions differ widely in respect of these two groups. Therefore, a separate but simultaneous dealing is necessary in the analysis of the problem. Most of the civilian employees retire between 55-60 years against the majority in the Army who retire at 50. Thus the Army officer's service tenure is reduced by 5-10 years compared to a civilian employee. This period normally is most taxing on the Army officer since his responsibilities will be at their peak. The ex-service officer should atleast be able to earn as much, if not more as his Army pay, during 5-10 years after retirement.

WORLD OF SPECIALIZATION

Today we live in a world of specialization. Rare fields of learning of yesteryear have bifurcated themselves into various specialized disciplines today. The world needs a specialist and not a generalist. We all do specialize in our own arm/service but this may not be of much significance to the civil organisations where the specialist qualifications expected of us are most of the times entirely different than what majority of us acquire during our service in the Army. We should therefore specialize to be absorbed in civil organisations at a later date. This specialization is in the form of education/work experience.

EDUCATION

Ex-service officers face the problem of securing a job due to the absence or inadequacy of qualification and work experience required by the civilian agencies.

(a) Compared to those from the technical Arms, the officers from the non-technical Arms are the worse victims of this problem. Officers from the non-technical Arms should be given an opportunity to prosecute higher studies in civil institutions, in areas of their choice for a period of 3-4 years during their service. This may further their chances for better resettlement. It may generally be ensured that the course, the officer is allowed to do, must be of some direct use to the Army to the extent possible. However many areas exist, the specialization of which may not be of any direct use to the Army and so this aspect need not be emphasised at all.

Is there a true justification in allowing these officers to spend 3-4 years of their service on higher studies and thus depriving the

Army of their service for that duration? This may be the general doubt of the policy makers. The justification does exist. The technically unqualified officers (not to confuse with those from the non-technical arms) joining Technical arms spend, at present, 3 years in the various Army training institutions, for their engineering degree studies. Moreover some of these officers and some of the technical graduates also spend 2 years for post-graduation in engineering/Management. Thus a technically unqualified regular officer (from the technical arms) spends out of his service a minimum of three years for graduation to a maximum of five years for graduation and post-graduation. In the case of technical graduates, the minimum being nothing for those not selected for post-graduation, the maximum will be two years. But the officers from non-technical arms, at present, do not spend anytime out of their services for similar courses. Will it not, therefore, be proper for the government, in view of the above justification, to also allow those from the non-technical arms for higher studies for 3-4 years on par with the other group? The cost-benefit ratio, in so doing, should not be considered at all since the facility, if extended, will have a salutary effect on the officers morale. Will the government say that this inherent disadvantage of the non-technical officers is already being compensated for by their faster promotions compared to technical Arms officers? These promotions are only after the rank of Major and since the fate of those who retire at 50 years (of whom we are concerned) does not change by virtue of this promotions the government may not be very correct in saying what is stated above.

(b) The percentage of officers selected for post-graduation is always microscopic. All the officers should be allowed to continue post-graduate studies for 2-3 years, at a time suitable to the officers. By so doing, a technical graduate officer would spend 2-3 years out of the service for studies and in the case of a regular officer this totals to 5-6 years including the time spent while in the service for the engineering degree. Irrespective of these figures, all the officers should be allowed to do post graduate studies.

The technical graduate is available for service as a qualified engineer right from the day of entry into the Army, while a regular officer attains that status only after a period of 6-8 years of commissioned service (A regular officer normally attends the engineering degree after three years of service and a SSRC officer attends it almost one year after being granted PRC).

The ante-date that is granted to the technical graduates is to cater, probably, for the extra time spent by them (5 years) for an engineering degree compared to the time spent by a regular officer (3 years) before joining the Army for a non-engineering degree.

On an analogy with that of regular officers government will be justified to allow all technical graduates for post-graduate

studies. However, notwithstanding the above, the regular officer also should be allowed to continue post-graduation since the cost benefit ratio in the case of all officers in doing post-graduation will be beneficial to the state.

There are two options open to the government. On one hand the continuance of the policy of not allowing the non-technical arms officers to continue higher studies (as it exists now) and on the other allowing all the types of officers to do so as proposed. The effects of the former are quite well known to all of us: the ex-service officers plight for a new living. The latter, if allowed, will raise the morale of the officers cadre but also will help the Army to get a reputation for itself as being able to provide enough civil educational opportunities to its officers, so that these are welcomed into the fold of the civil employment agencies very willingly once they retire. Isn't it a point to ponder about? Every right-minded person will vote for the latter keeping the broader interests of the Army in particular and the nation in general.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Allowing so many officers of the Army for higher studies, may be a great burden on the Army. Is there a way out? Yes. It seems so. Government of India, various other governments, scientific and public institutions offer every year tens of hundreds of scholarships for higher studies at home and abroad. At present, no provision exists to allow the Army officers to compete for these scholarships. The Govt should permit all Army officers to compete in the open for these scholarships. In case where the scholarship amount exceeds or at least equals that of the pay of the officers, the officers should be asked to opt for these scholarships. In case where the scholarship amount is less than the salary of the officer, he should be allowed to draw the scholarship and a part of the salary so that these two totalled together equal the normal monthly salary of the officer. In case of the non-existence of such a provision as of now, necessary steps may be taken to allow the officers to do so.

COURSES

Lot of efforts are being made to get some of the courses of the Army recognised as equivalent to the civil courses to facilitate resettlement. The results are not very promising indeed. It will be better trying to solve the problem from the other end. The Government should identify some civilian courses, which if attended by the Army officers, will acquaint them with the subject matter of the courses to the same extent as will be done by a similar course offered, by the Army. Thus, those courses, where the objective of the civil courses coincides more or less with that of the Army courses, should be listed. The Army Officers should be sent to these civil courses so

that the problem of getting recognition for the Army course will minimise. If there be any difference in the objective of the civil and the Army courses, the civil course may be suitably modified to cater for the additional needs of the Army officers. In cases where specific military knowledge is to be imparted to the Army officers in addition to the civil course contents, the same may be imparted exclusively for the Army officers in the Army training establishments. This proposal, if accepted, will reduce the efforts to get recognition for the Army courses from civil institutions. Common areas where civil and military course interests coincide are Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning, post-graduate engineering diplomas, petroleum, telecommunication, Supply and transport, various disciplines of management, educational sciences and all the degree engineering courses. The proposal may have a welcome relief on the Army Budget since it enables reduction of staff and connected costs in the Army Training establishments. Moreover, any officer who attends any of these courses walks out confidently with a civil qualification in hand. Coupled with the above is the proposal to encourage Army officers to do civil courses, which may benefit them in their Army career. This will have the dual advantage.

EMPLOYMENT

Lack of work experience in a related field stands in the way of an ex-service officer finding a suitable job in the civil agencies. This problem can be overcome if every service officer is allowed to serve in any government/reputed private agency for a period of 2-3 years. At present, Army officers are sent on deputation only to those agencies which request for the Army officers. There may be many agencies, which may not be specifically requesting for the Army officers on their staff but will not be very reluctant to have them, if approached. In most Government organisations, every employee is allowed to apply for deputation thrice a year. Similar facility should be extended to the Army officers so that they are allowed to apply through normal channels for deputation, in direct response to advertisements appearing in the press. True, all of us are aware that the Army will not be able to provide suitable working experience required for civil jobs to all its officers but if the Army can let them have it outside, isn't worth? In some cases, the experience thus gained by an officer while on deputation may help him in the Army career to some extent. This will also help him in earlier resettlement. If a service officer can prove his mettle and get selected for a civil job, the government must only be too willing to spare him accordingly for his own benefit and thus vote for a reduction of burden on it for his

resettlement. This may specially help the officers from non-technical arms to a great extent.

Be there a difficulty in extending this facility to all the officers, who should get priority? The officers who retire at the earliest age, obviously, should be preferred to others. Those who go up the ladder retire at the later age than these officers. Resettlement for the later is more important than for the former. Let us not doubt the capabilities of the early-retiring officers and thus prove to disqualify them for priority in employment. These officers could not go beyond a particular rank since they were relatively low in the merit. Should the percentage of promotions increase, some of them would definitely jump into the next rank, thus justifying their capabilities.

FINANCES

All of us are not very adequately paid to be able to save enough for the rainy day. It is a known fact that a suitable job abroad will enable everyone to overcome this problem. All the service officers should therefore be permitted to serve abroad with any Indian agency for a period of 2-3 years to better their finances, a rare possibility in the Army. In this context, the reported decision of Sri Lanka Government in accepting a committee recommendation that servicemen should be allowed to seek short term overseas employment which would benefit the services may be thoroughly analysed (as reported in the New Delhi Edition of the Times of India dated 31 Jul 81). This, if found suitable in helping the officers to improve their finance, may also be extended to our officers.

INCENTIVES

Suitable monetary incentives may be given to service officers acquiring civil qualifications, which the Government feels, will benefit the officers in faster resettlement, though these may not be of significance to the military career.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

One may visualize the future when there may be a requirement of peace-keeping forces: Sanitary Forces to ensure sanitation, Pollution prevention forces, forces for mass education drive, afforestation forces etc. The ex-service officer with their disciplined behaviour will suit any of these forces in an appropriate capacity.

UNEXPLORED FIELDS

Teaching remains to be one of the fields where very few ex-service officers settle in. The Government may consider the proposal of introducing "Defence Studies" as one of the subject at the graduate level and laying the qualification for the combined Defence Services examination as graduation with "Defence Studies" as one of the subjects. This will absorb a considerable percentage of the ex-service officers in the teaching profession and also bring in officers into the Army with better awareness of the defence matters.

RESERVATIONS

At present, certain percentage of vacancies of various grades are reserved in the Government agencies for ex-service officers. The percentage may be increased and more important will be the creation of a machinery, if not already existing, to enforce strict implementation of the reservation policies.

CREATION OF AN ENVIRONMENT

It is very unfortunate that most of the civilians consider the officers with service background joining the civil organisations as unwanted. Unless this attitude of the civilians is changed, it may prove to be very detrimental to the Army officers. It is therefore necessary to create an environment wherein the civilians regard the service officers as an asset to their organisation and thus be happy to receive them with open hands into their fold. For this, the ultimate and the penultimate levels in certain identified public sector organisations must be filled by the service officers so that they, by virtue of motivation rather than by compulsion, create an environment where the civil folk of these organisations readily respond positively to the process of recruitment of ex-service officers (There are at present 17 officers with defence service background manning various public sector undertakings so says a report. But, shouldn't this figure be increased?

Will it be out of place to mention that the service officers by virtue of their sense of discipline and dedication to the duty continue to occupy positions of eminence in various countries. Should we lag behind? No, not at all.

RAISING OF AGE LIMIT

All the above proposals, if implemented, may not fit into the service span of an officer. In view of the rise in the average span of

life due to rapid advancements in science and technology, would it not be proper to consider an increase in the retirement age of the officers?

CONCLUSION

The recommendations made so far aim at reducing the intensity of the problem of resettlement of the ex-service officers. To cater for the strength of officers being allowed to proceed for higher studies/deputation/overseas jobs, the government may have to go in for a certain percentage of officers as floating strength over the normal requirements. All these recommendations, warrant a thorough and rational analysis viewed against a background of growing dissatisfaction among the retiring/retired service officers on one hand and the rapid downfall of the Army profession in the eyes of the nation at large on the other. The problem of finances that might arise to implement these, can definitely be sacrificed for the sake of the welfare of ex-service officers, the motivation of the youth and the social status of the Army profession. Needless to say that a career in the Army, at onetime among the first few preferences of a youth has of late, been climbing down the ladder. It is therefore the duty of every right-minded person to help motivate the youth prefer a career in the services and thus be able to bring the Army back to its glory. Let our Great Army get a name for looking after its officers equally well whether they are in or out of the uniform.

It is time for us to think, act and faster. Let's do so and not be wanting any more.