

Veterans and the Society*

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We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is therefore not an act but a habit. - Aristotle

"I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do." - Leonardo da Vinci

"Apply yourself. Get all the education you can, but then, by God, do something. Don't just stand there, make it happen." - Lee Iacocca

INTRODUCTION

Since Independence in 1947, the defence forces in general and the army in particular, have been viewed as the defenders of the nation, kept and maintained to fight the country's wars and conflicts. Over the years, the defence forces have developed into a highly professional body, and remained "apolitical". During these years, although the civil society has been transformed radically, the influence on the defence forces has been marginal at best.

Henceforth, when I use the word 'army', it will be in the generic sense and will cover all the three services – army, navy and air force.

All military personnel in India voluntarily choose the defence forces as a career. They have led and continue to lead a segregated life in various military stations, whether in 'field areas' or in 'peace stations'. The army is a self-contained institution, which caters for all the needs of its officers and men, as well as their families. This is so in both field areas and peace stations. Although life in the army is extremely active and demanding, it is also enjoyable and is in many ways akin to a home, where all one's requirements are met.

This cloistered existence tends to keep all army personnel somewhat detached and not fully in sync with the real situation in the civil society. Contacts with the civil society are infrequent; mostly confined at the official level and with friends and relatives during leave. Of course, all personnel are in touch with events, perhaps even more than their civilian counterparts, through the media and the large number of events that the army organises, more or less on a continuous basis. However, our view tends to get coloured by our own actions, which in turn are due to the discipline, camaraderie and the ethos of brotherhood and sacrifice which prevails in the defence forces. The antics of political leaders and the gradual decline of the bureaucracy are looked at from a superior stand point, because of the elitism which all ranks feel for their chosen profession. This attitude is encouraged by the superiors, as it results in professional advancement, increase in self-confidence and a work culture that produces results.

In the last three decades or so, the situation has changed, because of ever increasing involvement of the army in counter insurgency and counter terrorism duties. At one level, the quality of life of the officers and men has taken a downward slide and at another level, there is better understanding of the civil society, on account of the increased interaction with both citizens and civil government officials. Despite this, the warm cocoon provided by the army institutionally continues.

We need to look at the veterans in the light of this background. When personnel of the defence forces cease to be on the active list, either because of superannuation, retirement or being boarded out on medical grounds, they step into a somewhat alien world, where re-integration with the civil society is not easy. They find that there is a mismatch between the veteran's aspirations from the society and in turn, the society's expectations from the veterans in contributing to the well being of the community.

The Indian Army is over 1.1 million strong today. As the strength of the Army increases, so does the strength of the veterans. Added to that is the increase in longevity, which further adds to the strength of the veterans and their families. For a veteran's population of this size, the number and extent of plans, both for their welfare and using their talents are abysmally low. The existing policies and plans touch only peripheral areas, which do not give much satisfaction or joy. Most professional militaries do have elaborate policies and schemes for their veterans, but in India, neither the central government, nor the state governments, nor indeed the service headquarters focus adequately on the veterans. Resultantly, the situation today is that the veterans are playing little role in nation building; neither is their considerable talent being tapped.

BACKGROUND

Nearly sixty thousand personnel of the defence forces retire annually and revert to the civil society from where they had joined the service two, three or four decades back. Our jawans retire in their late thirties; the junior commissioned officers (JCO's) in their mid-to-late forties and the bulk of the officers retire in their mid-fifties. These are young ages indeed. Even the 15 to 18 three star officers (lieutenant generals and equivalent), retiring annually, do so at the age of 60, which also is a comparatively young age. They still have many productive years ahead.

The veterans bring with them a lot of talent, but find that there are no takers for their expertise, not only in the area of security, but in many diverse fields. The army teaches us many skills, which not only make us win battles and wars, but makes personnel outstanding leaders, managers and administrators, whether they go home as majors or major generals or as a naik or a subedar. Till a few years back, the problem lay with us, as we could not project our skills and worth to the corporate world, as well as others who could have used the military in their ventures, in the language they understood. We have now changed that by translating all skills into corporate language, but the malaise persists.

Most veterans are young and have many family liabilities. Although they get a pension from the government for services rendered to the nation, it is obviously not enough and hence most are under pressure to look for a second career. This is applicable to both officers and men. However, till the last few years, there were no jobs for them. For the jawans, both the central and state governments have reserved some Group C and Group D posts. The reservation in the central government ministries and departments is 10 and 20 per cent in Group C and Group D posts; in public sector undertakings (PSU's) and banks it stands at 14.5 per cent in Group C and 24.5 per cent in Group D posts. They look nice on paper, but are never fully filled. Only a token are taken and the others rejected on flimsy grounds. The statistics speak for themselves. In 2007, a total of 4, 222 veterans were given employment in civil jobs. The figures for 2006 and 2005 are 7,230 and 3,677 respectively. In any case, there are no reserved jobs in the government, the PSU's or the private sectors for officers and JCO's.

Society has vast expectations that the veterans will play a vital role in 'nation building' activities. Before we proceed further, there is a need to understand what we mean by the term 'nation building'. Nation-building, as it is commonly referred to, is a broad effort to promote political and economic reforms with the objective of transforming the society. The aim of such efforts is to redirect the competition for wealth and power, which takes place within any society. Nation building tasks include security in all its manifestations; humanitarian relief, if needed; good governance; economic stabilisation; sustaining democracy; and developmental tasks, which include fostering economic growth, poverty reduction, and infrastructure improvements. The ultimate objective of any nation-building mission is to create a society, which remains at peace with itself. Such tasks take time, energy and funds to accomplish.

Nation-building includes the creation of superficial national paraphernalia, like flags, symbols and so on, but at a deeper level, national identity needs to be deliberately created by moulding different groups into a nation, especially since colonialism had used divide and rule tactics to maintain its domination. Even after 60 years of Independence, this aspect continues to be important.

One may well say that these are tasks for the government, as it has many instruments to perform these tasks. This is theoretically correct, but governments by themselves cannot achieve them, unless the civil society joins in wholeheartedly. Within the civil society, the veterans are the most suitable group that can motivate the others and act as catalysts for this important task. We will revert to this subject a little later, after I have covered some factual details.

It is unfortunate that there are no schemes or plans of the government for involving the veterans in the process of 'nation building'. In fact, the ground situation today is that the three entities who should have such plans, viz. the army or the defence forces, the central government and the state governments have formulated practically no plans for the veterans.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

The veterans expect a lot from the army, without understanding that the army has no organisation for the veterans. The branches at Army Headquarters, which deal with welfare, ceremonial and personnel matters i.e. the Adjutant General's and the Military Secretary's branches are designed only for serving personnel and some minimal work for the veterans, like pension anomalies, medical boards, pending allotment of medals and so on. The same situation prevails in Command and lower headquarters. Yet, the veterans expect them to solve all their problems, without realising that they are neither designed nor tasked to do so. It must however be clarified that the army is such a wonderful organisation that if one approaches it with a problem, all efforts are made to help the individual, even though it is not a task assigned to them. I am afraid this does not happen in the other Class 'A' services of the government of India or the states.

The question that arises is - 'should the defence forces be tasked and consequently structured for a role relating to the veterans'? There are divergent views on the subject, but if the ministries and departments of the government have failed miserably in this respect, perhaps there is a case for the Services to take on the mantle, although this does not fall under the purview of the defence forces.

We next come to the government of India or the central government. Let me clarify here that in accordance with our Constitution, welfare of veterans' falls both in the central as well as the state lists.

The present UPA government had announced, with much fanfare, that they would set up a separate department for veteran affairs, but all they have done is to take out existing entities and put them under an additional secretary, thereby creating one more post for the bureaucracy! The entities under him are doing the same job as they were doing earlier. There is also no political overseeing of the department, as no minister has been appointed. The new department called "Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare" was created on 22 September 2004. Organisational structure is shown on Chart 1. The main objective of creating this department was to give focussed attention to the welfare programmes for ex-servicemen and their dependents, including pensionary benefits, re-employment and rehabilitation. It has the following broad functions:-

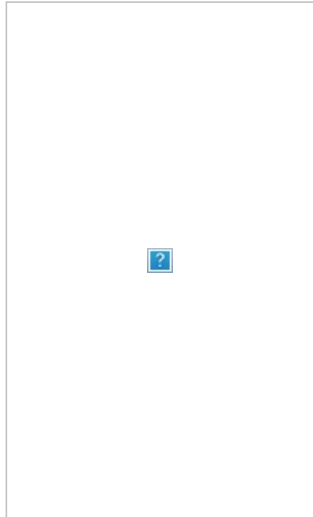
- (a)** All aspects of re-settlement and welfare of ex-servicemen and their dependents, including liaison with

State Governments.

- (b)** Ex-Servicemen's Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS).
- (c)** Matters relating to the Directorate General of Resettlement and Kendriya Sainik Board.
- (d)** Administration of all aspects of pensions.

There were about 19.50 lakh veterans and about 4 lakh widows registered as on 30 June 2005. The number of veterans is increasing rapidly and is assessed as 22 to 25 lakh. When you add up the strength of their immediate families, the numbers exceed a crore. Is the Department achieving these tasks to the satisfaction of the veterans? I am afraid not, but let us proceed further.

The Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare formulates various policies for the welfare and resettlement of the veterans in the country. It has two divisions - Resettlement and Pension. The Department is assisted by two Inter Services Organisations, Directorate General of Resettlement (DGR) and Kendriya Sainik Board (KSB). Whereas the KSB, which is headed by Raksha Mantri as its ex-officio President, lays down general policies for the welfare of veterans and their dependents and also administers welfare funds, the office of the DGR is responsible for various policies/schemes/programmes adopted by the Government. The DGR has five Director Resettlement Zones (DRZs) in five Army Commands.



The KSB and DGR are also assisted by various Rajya and Zila Sainik Boards, which are under the administrative control of respective state governments. The Government of India and the state governments bear 50 per cent each of the expenditure incurred on the organisation of RSBs. Let us now have a look at Rajya Sainik Boards.

In 1919, the District Soldiers, Sailors & Airmen's Boards were established by the British Government in all the States, for the purpose of looking after the welfare of ex-defence personnel demobilised after the First Great War. The District Boards used to be headed by the Secretary at the district level and were contributing in a small way for the ex-servicemen's welfare. In 1972, these Boards were re-designated as Zila Sainik Boards and placed under the control of the deputy commissioners (DCs) of districts. The administrative control of the Rajya Sainik Board (RSB) and the Zila Sainik Boards (ZSB) used to be with the Chief Secretary of the state government. I will now take the example of only one state, viz. Punjab to highlight the working of the RSB.

In 1983, the Secretaries of the Zila Sainik Boards were re-designated as District Sainik Welfare Officers with the status of Class I Officers. In 1984, the Government decided to establish a separate Directorate of Sainik Welfare Punjab. The RSB has the following duties:-

- Registering names of veterans and sponsoring them to various departments against 13 per cent reserved vacancies. Deficiencies are brought to the notice of the Government.
- Providing cash awards/land, annuity and other concessions' to the gallantry award winners.
- Granting financial assistance to the families of killed/disabled defence personnel.
- Sanctioning War Jagirs to the families whose son/sons serve in defence forces of the country.
- Providing financial assistance to veterans suffering from chronic diseases like T.B., cancer and major surgeries out of the Punjab Amalgamated Fund.
- Administering the Punjab Amalgamated Fund and disbursing about Rs. 45.00 lakh (approximately) each year for the welfare of veterans.
- Providing grants to veterans for the marriage of their daughters.
- Organising Flag Day Fund collections.
- Organising rallies for veterans, with a view to listen to their grievances and to educate them about new facilities given to them.
- Assisting veterans in resolving their pensionary or other service related problems and looking after war widows and wards of the battle casualties.

- Providing coaching facilities for selected wards of veterans for appearing in various competitive tests.
- Rehabilitation of army deserters.
- Reservation of seats in educational institutions.
- Liaison with recruiting agencies, army and command headquarters and other departments of Government.
- Holding of Rajya Sainik Board and Amalgamated Fund Committee meetings.
- Nominations of Zila Sainik Boards.
- Admission into RIMC and Sainik Schools.
- Territorial Army matters.
- Maintenance of War Memorials.
- Providing basic computer education to veterans, widows and their wards for their gainful employment through the Sainik Vocational Training Centres being run at district levels

While all this looks impressive, it would be clear that none of them deal with any 'nation building' tasks. Their focus is only on a minuscule portion of veterans and not the veterans as a whole. There is also no plan or scheme to amalgamate the veterans in to civil society. I am quite certain that this situation prevails in all states, in varying degrees.

Let me now briefly focus on the veterans' organisation in USA, as a comparison. The United States has the most comprehensive system of assistance for veterans of any nation in the world. The Veterans Administration (VA) was established in 1930, by the Congress enacting a law. The responsibilities and benefits programmes of the Veterans Administration grew enormously during the following six decades. World War II resulted in not only a vast increase in the veteran population, but also in large number of new benefits enacted by the Congress for veterans of the war. The World War II GI Bill, signed into law on June 22, 1944, is said to have had more impact on the American way of life than any other law in the previous 100 years. Further educational assistance acts were passed for the benefit of veterans of the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam Era, Persian Gulf War, and the All-Volunteer Force.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was established as a Cabinet-level position on March 15, 1989. President Bush hailed the creation of the new Department saying, "There is only one place for the veterans of America, in the Cabinet Room, at the table with the President of the United States of America."

The VA health care system has grown from 54 hospitals in 1930, to include 171 medical centres; more than 350 out patient, community, and outreach clinics; 126 nursing home care units; and 35 domiciliaries. VA health care facilities provide a broad spectrum of medical, surgical and rehabilitative care. For Financial Year 2009, the budget proposal for the veterans is \$ 93.7 billion. There are many other details, but it is not possible to include them here.

SUGGESTED CHANGES

At the Army Level

Let me now make some recommendations. First, what can the army do? Soldiers make a life-long commitment to the army. Consequently, there is need to maintain a continued sense of belonging. The army needs to foster these ties and provide adequate opportunities to continue the link between the veterans and serving personnel, in terms of camaraderie, consultations, concern for their welfare and support. Our personnel need a sense of belonging even more after they leave the army. One answer is to set up an Army Association, with chapters in each state. The Indian Air Force already has an Air Force Association. The Navy too has The Naval Foundation.

There is also a need for the army to aggressively market the competence of all ranks of the army. The army has a major shortage, but for some reason I am unable to fathom, the army avoids using the services of retired officers to fill at least some of the voids. Such suggestions are superficially heard, but dismissed as impracticable. Can retired officers fill vacancies in training establishments, static headquarters, specialised technical appointments in projects where continuity is a major requirement, like war gaming or components evolving various systems for net-centric warfare and so on? I strongly feel they can. There are other places too, where the veterans can be employed within the army. Some of the major inhibitions of the army are considerations of seniority, demands for equal facilities, lack of control and so on. All these are minor issues, easily resolvable. One solution is to employ the veterans on a contractual basis for specified periods. I would urge the army to give this a serious thought.

At Government Level

Secondly, at the government level, there is an imperative need to ensure that the large manpower of highly disciplined, motivated and skilled personnel that leaves the army every year is gainfully utilised during the

productive years of the soldiers, when they have maximum potential to contribute their worth. An assured placement after leaving the army would provide greater confidence to officers and soldiers and this knowledge itself would motivate them to do better even in service. It will also be a major incentive to attract better individuals to the army, which is reeling under major shortages of officers today. Massive media effort needs to be generated to make both the private and public sectors change their attitude to soldiers and employ them, in accordance with their considerable and varied skills.

Nation Building Tasks

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, is the need for the central and state governments to involve the veterans in nation building tasks. Precedents already exist, where the contributions of the army have been outstanding. Training imparted in the Services to the officers, Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO's) and men, not only makes them good leaders and soldiers, but inculcates skills and more importantly values which they imbibe during their service, which make them ideal material for carrying out developmental activities and employment in developmental schemes.

The need is to set up hierarchical organisations, on the lines of army structures, for carrying out developmental activities in towns and villages. The manning of the organisation at successive levels should largely be by the veterans.

The examples of Land Armies, which did excellent work in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, can be cited. The Karnataka Land Army was constituted in the 1970's to tackle the problems of unemployed youth of rural areas. The main objectives of the scheme were:-

- (a)** To inculcate a sense of discipline in youth.
- (b)** To train them in the art of working together as a body.
- (c)** To make use of the labour force thus available, for the creation of permanent productive assets.

The land army had General P P Kumaramangalam, former Chief of Army Staff, as the Chairman with Brigadier VP Naib as the Managing Director, and a few Joint Directors, who were in charge of Administration, Works, Project Heads and so on. All jobs were given to military officers, so as to give the necessary quasi-military character and because they had imagination, knowledge, leadership, drive and were capable of achieving results, instead of looking over their shoulders for instructions.

A typical example was the preparation of the project plan for Bidar District. This task was given to both the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and to the Land Army. CSIR produced three bulky volumes on costly paper, costing a large sum and proposed expenditure of Rs nine lakh for a thorough aerial survey and photo-interpretation thereafter. On the other hand, the Land Army produced a project report, which was a workable plan at the reasonable cost of Rs. 1500.00 after a physical survey of the land.

The Karnataka Land Army was successful in eliminating the weaknesses of existing implementation agencies and fighting the evil of the prevailing corrupt and slow system, but against heavy odds. The work of the Land Army was characterised by speed, economy and high technical standards, largely because of the training of the field staff on military lines in developing the qualities of leadership, integrity and devotion to duty, as well as technical competence in the field. The Land Army, in their initial five years, till March 1978 handled works having a capital outlay of Rs 2,023.50 lakh and operated in 17 districts of Karnataka, most of them in remote areas. Instead of contractors, only local people were employed. This also resulted in direct benefits to their own communities.

In Madhya Pradesh too, the Land Army was organised to tackle the problem of mounting unemployment and deteriorating moral values in our rural youth. The first Land Army battalion commenced functioning in December 1980 in Rewa and gradually increased its presence in 24 districts.

The experience of these two Land Armies can be used in many schemes, including soil reclamation, forestry, adult education, road construction, housing, hygiene and sanitation and flood control measures. General Kumaramangalam, while commenting on the Land Army Organisation had stated as under: -

“Our main asset was the practical application of the knowledge of man-management we had acquired during our service. The officers from the armed forces have one distinct advantage over bureaucrats. They are trained to take decisions and habituated to see that orders from these decisions are carried out. The bureaucrats do not like taking decisions, and once orders are passed, take little care in implementing them”.

The positive traits of the veterans do need to be exploited for the good of the nation. Although the bulk of our population is still rural-based, our villages have not developed, are poor, and lack even the basic necessities of life. The employment of veterans in projects, which would substantially enhance infrastructure and bring prosperity to our villages would be greatly beneficial and would add to ‘nation building’.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme that has been recently launched is one scheme where the veterans can play a major role. The scheme promises that one member from each of the country's 60 million rural households is guaranteed 100 days of work each year. They will receive a minimum wage of 60 rupees (\$1.35) or an unemployment allowance if there is no work. It is the biggest social security net ever provided in India. But will it succeed or go the same way as many major schemes launched in the past?

A large number of schemes and programmes initiated by the Government in the past, for employment, housing,

area development and so on, like Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, Million Wells Scheme, Self-employment and Entrepreneurial Development Programme, Ganga Kalyan Yojna, Indira Awas Yojna and so on have largely been failures. It is not that the schemes were flawed, but they failed on account of lack of effective monitoring, implementation and accountability. The new schemes will also suffer the same fate, if we do not revamp the entire work force. The present implementers are the same senior and junior bureaucrats, corrupt to the core, who will siphon away all the funds and the poor rural folk will continue to remain poor. Neither will any meaningful infrastructural improvement take place. We need to create self-reliant villages and an organisation composed of veterans from top to bottom, for the effective monitoring, implementation and accountability of such schemes for rural areas. I strongly make a plea that special purpose vehicles like the Land Armies of the past be formed.

Over a year back, while attending the Hindustan Times Summit, I had suggested this to Mrs Sonia Gandhi and she had stated that it was a good idea and that she would convey it to the Prime Minister. Later, I sent off a detailed proposal to both Mrs Gandhi and to the Prime Minister. The latter did reply, but I do not see anyone implementing the proposal. Perhaps the limitless greed of the concerned officials has again come in the way and stopped the proposal in its tracks!

Such an organisation need not be for rural areas only. It can contribute positively in urban development too. After all, there could not be better examples than the well-administered military cantonments and military stations vis-à-vis towns and cities administered by municipalities.

Commenting on veterans, General S Padmanabhan, the former Chief of Army Staff, had stated in his Message in a book on the subject “the book will not only highlight to the government and NGO’s the gross under utilisation of a vast human resource (veterans), but also enable them to adopt innovative methods to garner this valuable resource towards nation building and development”. I hope what General Padmanabhan had stated, does in fact come about.

Suggestions for the Veterans

Having highlighted what the three concerned institutions in our country – the defence forces, the central government and the state governments are doing or not doing about veterans, it would be appropriate to say a few words about the veterans themselves.

In the later years of my service in the army, I always felt and sometimes articulated that some veterans were the biggest pain in the neck for serving persons. After I demitted service and joined the ranks of the veterans, this view, instead of diminishing, has been further reinforced. Aspirations of some veterans are akin to the proverbial bottomless well, for they seem never to be satisfied. Perhaps there are good reasons for this, which my limited intelligence is unable to comprehend. Be as it may, let me make a few quick points.

The first is that the veterans must accept the fact that they are no longer serving personnel and consequently there has to be a reduction, if not elimination of the perks and privileges they had enjoyed earlier. The earliest this sinks in, the better would be your quality of life as well as peace of mind. You must have expectations, of course, but these must be commensurate with your new station in life.

My second point relates to your behaviour and life style as a veteran. In the defence forces, you had led an extremely active life, working hard, ready for operations at short notice, training hard, participating in sports and partying hard when time and resources permitted. Can you suddenly change and become a civilian? Obviously not! Therefore, remain a soldier, sailor or airman and do not succumb, whether it is in the field of deportment, character, turnout, adhering to time, disciplined approach to life, obeying orders and so on. There is a lot of respect for soldiers, both serving and veterans amongst the citizens of this country. We need to be worthy of this respect by our actions.

Thirdly, ‘Izzat’ or honour is probably the most important single value that a soldier seeks. It must continue to occupy that position of pre-eminence when you join the ranks of the veterans. I would also urge the bureaucracy and people from other walks of life to bear in mind the importance soldiers of all categories attach to this.

Fourthly, veterans must find their rightful place in national development. Veterans the world over have been accepted as important pillars of the nations polity. Although ‘nation building’ by the veterans finds acceptability amongst the public, there is also hostility. A large number of veterans have done highly creditable work in reviving and turning around dying or dead organisations, both in the public and private sectors. They have found opposition from bureaucrats and technocrats, who feel the veterans are intruding in their domains. This hostility needs to be contained in the interest of the nation. Veterans need to rise to meet the aspiration of millions of our poor people. Merely living in the small realm of your own fraternity will make you both tired and retired, when in actuality you are neither.

Fifthly, get united. In the milieu in which we live, your voice will only be heard if it is the voice of the group, not disparate individuals. It should not be like this, but the sad fact is that it is.

Many veterans, without waiting for plans and schemes to be floated by governments, have commenced working for the people on their own or by forming or joining NGO’s, which are carrying out useful work for the betterment of those of our compatriots who have needs or come under the category of “weaker sections of society”. I know many who are deeply involved in such welfare work, in both cities and villages. I am myself heading an institution – the War Wounded Foundation – which has been set up to assist our comrades who have been disabled in war or war like conflicts. You too can choose a cause, which appeals to you.

My last suggestion to the veterans is to remain busy and do so in the area that appeals to you most. It is the

panacea for a healthy life. Please remember that there is also a world beyond the golf course, which beckons you. According to the Indian way of life, “karma is dharma”. It is as much applicable to the veterans as to every one else. So do your dharma for the nation and the society.

CONCLUSION

Personnel of the defence forces learn many skills during their service. These include leadership skills of a very high order, even amongst our non-commissioned officers (NCO's). Depending on their Arms and Corps, as well as their trades and specialisations, they have a large variety of skills, both technical and non-technical.

It is unfortunate that the Nation has been unable to utilise these considerable skills and talents, because of lack of will and focus, as well as suitable organisations, which can voice their aspirations and bring forth their availability to the attention of the policy makers of our country, as also to the captains of our industry. The Department of Ex-servicemen Welfare is supposed to do this, but our experience with this organisation or its earlier 'avatar' has been less than satisfactory.

In the existing environment in the country, besides their talents and skills, the veterans bring with them a high degree of dedication to duty, a great amount of hard work and diligent application, obedience to authority, impartiality, secularism of the highest level and a culture of sacrifice.

Having served the country in an exemplary manner, in all types of terrain and in highly adverse environments, they are both physically and mentally tough. They are therefore ideal material to be employed in rural and other difficult areas, where their civilian counterparts do not want to venture.

A few decades back, when we were a younger democracy and when the stranglehold of the bureaucracy was not all pervasive, as it is today, the veterans were utilised in varied nation building efforts, in a number of states. Notable amongst these were Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, where the veterans, grouped into organisations called 'land armies' contributed considerably to nation building.

Over the years, our rural sector has languished, resulting in a massive movement from rural to urban areas on the one hand, and a diminishing agriculture growth on the other, coupled with continuing poverty and exploitation of the rural land-less and other inhabitants of our villages. Today, our political leadership is alive to this major problem. A number of rural upliftment schemes have been launched. While the aim is commendable and resources in terms of funds have been allocated, unless there are dedicated people to implement these schemes, they are unlikely to succeed. Earlier schemes for the rural sector have not succeeded, not because the schemes were inadequate, but because the people who had to implement them were either incapable or unwilling to implement them, or had their own vested interest in siphoning off the funds. Unless the work force is changed, the results will again be the same. It is here that the veterans would not only add a touch of dedication and diligence, but a fresh approach, steeped in the defence forces culture of task-accomplishment in the allocated time frame.

The young students and youth take inspiration from the elders and in many cases, the veterans act as role models. Veterans are a large reservoir and resource of disciplined, experienced and trained human capital that can be effectively used for nation building projects. The officers, as well as the rank and file from the defence forces retire at comparatively younger ages, and can be easily absorbed, after a short re-orientation training, both in government jobs, on contractual basis, or in NGOs (Non-Government Organisations), in developmental projects being undertaken in rural, semi-urban or urban areas.

Let me end this piece with a quote, appropriately dedicated to the personnel of the defence forces:

*"It's the Soldier, more than the reporter,
who has given us the freedom of the press.
It's the Soldier, more than the poet,
who has given us the freedom of speech.
It's the Soldier, more than the politician,
that ensures our right to Life, Freedom and the
Pursuit of Happiness.
It's the Soldier who salutes the flag,
who serves beneath the flag,
and
whose coffin is draped by the flag.*

..*Text of the talk delivered at Chandigarh on 14 March 2008.

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