

# Changing Socio-Economic Values and Their Impact on the Armed Forces

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The culture of consumerism has emerged as a dominant trend in today's India. It is an inevitable byproduct of the 'India story' - high growth rate, booming economy and emergence of a huge middle class with considerable purchasing power. Today the nation, after long years of industrial slumber and a sluggish economy, has finally broken free from the shackles of bureaucratic control with restrictive policies and has begun its long march towards becoming a developed nation. This profound change is bound to fundamentally alter the traditional, social and cultural values of any society in an irrevocable manner. This long march has also affected the Indian Armed Forces in ways more than one. On one hand, it is assisting in the modernisation of the forces, but on the other hand the lure of neon lights has radically shifted the values of the society, which in turn has created complex challenges for our volunteer Armed Forces, as the men in uniform are deeply intertwined with the society. This recent and marked shift in the socio-economic values in India has indeed posed some unique challenges for the Armed Forces. These unique challenges need to be identified and, thereafter, a suitable strategy to manage these changes; in consonance with the organisational requirements, needs to be evolved to retain our military effectiveness in these rapidly changing times.

## Our Core Values

The present values and standards of the Armed Forces are not abstract concepts whose genesis lies solely in the demands of battle. *Au contraire*, they are the very foundations of the services upon whom the entire structure has been constructed. They reflect our rich history and the subsequent evolution over the years as a formidable military machine. These core values are time-tested, having stood us in great stead in face of formidable challenges and

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trying battle conditions. Our culture too, is visibly distinct and has evolved over a period of time as a combination of legacy and organisational environment. The roots of this distinct culture lie deep within the glorious traditions which have been carried forward over the generations of men in uniform. Our values and culture are inseparable with each complementing the other and none can be viewed in isolation.

The Chetwode motto of '*The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time*' is an apt and unchanging description of our core values. Essentially, the devotion and selfless commitment to duty, honour, honesty, integrity, and loyalty along with moral and physical courage constitute our core values. These values are absolutely non-negotiable, irrespective of any societal changes which have or may take place in the years to come. It is the unflinching devotion to duty, unquestionable loyalty and a very strong sense of honour or '*Izzat*' of the regiment or '*Paltan*' which has enabled countless men to make the supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation. All these values finally metamorphose into a very strong sense of '*Izzat*' which has bonded together men from vastly diverse backgrounds, formed unique and formidable associations and has indeed been the most decisive factor which has motivated men to go beyond the call of duty. Though, part of it may be explained as natural bonding which is inevitably formed due to serving together under difficult conditions, it is only an unflinching faith in one's duty and the supreme consideration to uphold the '*Izzat*' which enables soldiers to volunteer for risky missions in which the chances of safe return are slim or at times to show restraint, even when doing so involves personal danger; and to witness injury or death to their comrades but still continue with the task in hand. Integrity and honesty are another set of values which are vital for success in any battle as no scope for deviation exists when the life of men depends upon honest and resolute decisions by the leaders and their undiluted implementation at all levels. Lastly, physical and moral courage are the very pillars upon which the military operations are eventually conducted.

### SOCIETAL CHANGES

The nation today is truly at the cross-roads of change. The rapid economic strides made in the last few years have created visible signs of prosperity and development. The glitzy malls,



gleaming highways, changing urban landscape, a bullish Sensex and the increased job opportunities in the private sector are indicators of the same. The growing Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and Information Technology (IT) industry has created a novel class of young people with their values oriented towards a western mindset. Though majority of these changes are limited to metros and other big cities, their influence has not been lost on the small cities and villages due to the deep penetration of media. The continuous beaming of various channels, accompanied with their direct or indirect hard selling of various products has created a unique awareness in the hinterland, where most of our men come from.

Consequently, the traditional values of the Indian society are undergoing a marked transition. Materialism has replaced simplicity, ambition has replaced contentment, aggressiveness has replaced modesty and a tearing hurry has replaced patience. The desire for consumer goods and impatience to achieve has transcended all boundaries including the ubiquitous urban-rural divide. The effect can be seen in increased spending habits with corresponding lower saving rates, continued migration to bigger cities and increased awareness level of the populace. Caution is being thrown to the winds and the basic values of yester-years are on the way of becoming the vain dreams of today. In an increasingly materialistic world the good old values of kindness, generosity, understanding and feeling are taken as the concomitants of failure while traits like sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness and aggressiveness are encouraged and even discreetly admired. This transition in importance accorded to values is not consistent with the glorious traditions and the core values of the Armed Forces.

The present generation in the urban areas believes in a splurge-today-pay-tomorrow philosophy and lives on roll over credit and Equated Monthly Instalments (EMIs). They consider their parents and elders as a 'sacrifice generation' which queued up for everything; from adulterated product of different environmental factors and is pretty sure of their present as well as the future. On the other hand, the previous generation, the 'Midnight Children' who grew up in the heady post-partition years with somewhat socialist influence and built their houses with their post-retirement money are gradually fading away into oblivion. An era is almost over. They will not even bother to rebel against the previous generation as they treat



rebellions or revolutions as quite unproductive activities. However, as tempting as it may be, we must resist from compartmentalising these changes as distinctly good or bad. They are merely changes and momentous they may seem as of now, changes happen all the time.

Though the nation may still be at the cross-roads with economic changes yet to affect a large proportion of our teeming millions, the winds of change which precede economic transformation have covered the majority of the country. The winds of change also have been sweeping across the last citadels of traditional social structures. Nuclear families are now the norm rather than the exception. The land holdings have consequently been reduced to almost a pittance in the rural areas. This reduction, coupled with large scale hidden unemployment in rural areas has made acquisition of a regular job as an economic necessity. This has resulted in an increased number of the small families who are devoid of the traditional support system from the extended or joint family and a rise in the number of working women. Consequently, a plethora of functional problems in sustenance and running of a family have risen, which have to be regularly addressed by the head of the family. However, practical difficulties due to exigencies of service have rendered it difficult for the men in uniform to strike a reasonable balance between his home and professional front. Though the Armed Forces as such are not incompatible with a regular family life, certain modifications and adjustments are indeed the need of the hour.

### **Aspirations of the Indian Youth**

The average Indian youth today is an individual with some differences in perception along the urban-rural divide. The younger generation in cosmopolitan or large cities is exposed to all the essentials of developed societies; more and better services in education, health and transport sectors, work opportunities, access to modern technology, better amenities and increased competition. There have been changes in the smaller towns and villages as well, due to greater educational opportunities and increased awareness levels, kind courtesy the drastic mushrooming of mass media.

The average Indian youth is thus considerably sharper, aware, demanding, ambitious and competitive than his predecessors just a few decades back. Their aspirations too often centre around



materialistic trappings. The key aspirations may be prioritised with the financial benefits topping the charts. It consists of a well-paid job which promises good earnings for foreseeable years. Social security, including prestige and status in our class-conscious society, and ability to look after one's family are the next in the order of precedence. However, in their scheme of things, the social security is directly dependent upon the financial wherewithal.

A challenging job with good working conditions and relative freedom of decision making in which one can significantly contribute or 'make a difference' – as it is popularly called, is another priority. This is closely linked with a burning ambition to climb the ladder, even if some compromises are to be made in the means while achieving the ends. The allotted time frame for the completed wish-list is, however, quite short, and a majority of the youth are keen on achieving their desired goals and improving their quality of life in a very short span of time. They do take basic amenities like housing, education and medical cover for granted and thus, further aim for techno-gadgets facilitating a fast pace of life. These aspirations are slightly subdued among the youth from rural and semi-urban areas and are more pronounced in case of the youngsters from metros and bigger cities.

Not much is lost though. A recent *India Today* - AC Nielsen - ORG-MARG survey<sup>2</sup> of the urban Indian youth has brought out that nearly 88 per cent of them are ready to volunteer for the army, if asked to do so. Nearly half of them prefer government service to business or private sector and a large majority (nearly 70 per cent) continue to value their bonds with the family and prefer to stay in joint families. These figures can be safely increased for the rural and semi-urban areas. Thus, the overall trend in the Indian society, though marked by consumerism, is positive and a large, socially conscious and awakened youth population is more willing to strive for a better future for themselves and for their country. Perhaps, a conservative opinion may consider these ambitions trifle overstretching, they are merely a reflection of the changing times. The requirement at our end is to envisage accommodating the aspirations within the defined structures of the Armed Forces without compromising on our organisational terms of reference. The endeavour thus, is to attract the best talent and retain organisational efficiency, in spite of the societal changes. No organisation, however, regimented can ever outlive the changed perceptions of its base populace.



## EMBRACING CHANGE

The rapid changes in the society and the aspirations of the youth as enunciated above, bring us to the underlying necessity to embrace changed circumstances without compromising on our core values. In fact, there is no need to even contemplate any dilution of our unique culture and glorious traditions. The Armed Forces of the country have themselves undergone many successful transformations by embracing new circumstances. Independence in 1947 brought one such massive transition, rapid modernisation and expansion post 1962 War was another transition which perhaps culminated in a brilliant campaign across erstwhile East Pakistan, and in the recent years the prowess acquired in fighting successful counter insurgency operations by an essentially conventional Armed Forces may be termed as another successful transformation. Thus, considerable flexibility exists in the organisation and our solutions can be tailored 'in-house' without looking outwards for any fancy designers or slick quick-fix experts.

India's national security objectives have themselves evolved against a backdrop of the nation's core values namely, democracy, secularism and peaceful co-existence and the national goal of social and economic development<sup>4</sup>. There will always be an overriding operational imperative to sustain team cohesion and to maintain trust, loyalty and the honour of the services under all circumstances in orders to accomplish the national security objectives. We may call it as our terms of reference. This ability of the Armed Forces to defend the country from external aggressions and internal disorders draws its strength from its core values and the unique traditions. There is no visible or inherent contradiction between retaining the essential values of the organisation, while absorbing a more aware, ambitious and educated class of people amongst its fold. Progress or societal changes do not dilute the national objectives. On this premise, we embrace change and we embrace it for a better tomorrow.

### Imbibing Right Values

*"It is the first few blows on the anvil of the life that give the human weapon the set and temper that carry him through life's battles.*

- Prince Edward VIII, Prince of Wales, on 13 March 1922 while inaugurating the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College at Dehradun.<sup>3</sup>



Having arrived at a consensus to adapt to changes, it is imperative that we steer clear of any adverse societal values influencing our profession of arms. The Armed Forces already have a time tested system of training and welfare of men which merely needs to be streamlined to adapt to the changed environs. While doing so, we must not confuse honour with rigidity and we must address the genuine aspirations and needs of men. We should also start early and catch them young.

The importance of imbibing correct service ethos at the right and impressionable age cannot be overstated. While a better management of the media and encouragement to organisations like National Cadet Corps (NCC) and Bharat Scouts and Guides would help to mould a better perception of our organisational ethos and the concept of *Izzat* among the youth of the nation, the training period should also increasingly reinforce the same. The positive impact of movies like *Top Gun* or *Saving Private Ryan* on the psyche of an average western youth is well acknowledged and similar efforts in India will go a long way in conveying our ethos to the target population. A renewed focus in the training centres and the training academies on adopting correct stance, irrespective of anything else shall pay handsome dividends. A highly regimented training curriculum with its emphasis on a 'spit and polish' regime may be substituted by a more accommodative and flexible training routine, provided there is no compromise on the moral values. Offences involving moral turpitude may be dealt with even more harshly, while the strict hierarchal structures may be loosened. The concept of 'Honour Courts' which has been fairly successful at the National Defence Academy (NDA) and the Indian Military Academy (IMA) may also be given a try at the training centres and establishments. There is also a need to improve our basic amenities and infrastructure in order to provide decent living conditions and some materialistic satisfaction.

There is an old English adage which states, "*Once a tree is young, it takes a turn. The tree grows but the turn remains*". A paramount need, therefore, exists to inculcate and reinforce the right ethics at an impressionable age. The technical skills can be progressively built up in the later years. The overall strategy is a simple combination of an *ab-initio* emphasis on the core values and concerted efforts on improving living and working conditions.



## Organisational Support

Once the right turn has been imparted in the formative years, the organisation should go an extra mile to ensure that the officers and the men consider any other influences or attractions as secondary. Though there are limitations in the Armed Forces in terms of pay and allowances which are not able to keep pace with the booming private sector, shortage of accommodation and frequent transfers to field areas; their impact can be minimised by creating positive working conditions. These positive conditions include healthy working relationships between superiors and subordinates, a positive, understating and helping attitude, transparency in dealings and delegation of responsibilities to the appropriate levels. Merely being open and accessible can itself resolve a large number of growing man-management problems. A liberal leave policy within the existing authorisation of leave will also foster a spirited working environment wherein, people feel that they are being 'looked after'. It may be worthwhile to remember that people generally leave bosses and not their jobs. We are also becoming increasingly bureaucratic in certain areas and such tendencies must be immediately jettisoned.

An upright and honest person, however outspoken must always be given his due. New ideas should be encouraged as long as they do not infringe on the basic military discipline and the core values. Games, sports and adventure activities are other fields which need to be actively promoted. Outdoors often nurture qualities which cannot be really comprehended in the class rooms. A positive atmosphere in the organisation will nullify many of the negative fall-outs of a consumerist society while strengthening the belief of its constituent people in the organisational ethos. The essence lies in imbibing right values and 'holding hands' in the times of need, particularly once a decision has been taken in good faith so that the belief in the core values is never shaken.

The much hyped 'Zero-Error Syndrome' is a Trojan horse which manifests itself in attractive forms in the services in spite of all attempts to the contrary. This may take the form of 'over-ensuring' during VIP visits, organising fall-in many hours in advance to ensure adherence to timings or over-indulgence in paper work. This leads to unproductivity and colossal wastage of time which is much resented at junior levels. This also reduces efficiency as the number



of man hours required for a perfect result are exponentially higher, as compared to those for a reasonable result which, nevertheless meets the basic requirements. However, this elusive Trojan horse is usually a novelty and often built on personal ambitions. The ruthless elimination of this 'Zero-Error Syndrome' in its various manifestations will be a yeoman's service to the Armed Forces and will directly improve productivity, working atmosphere and satisfaction levels, particularly at the junior levels. This will also be in consonance with the changed socio-economic values where such actions are contrary to the working norms.

### **Role of Military Leadership**

The military leadership is required to play a pivotal role in embracing changes by providing organisational support and encouragement while ensuring continued emphasis on retaining core values and ethics of the Armed Forces. This role translates into different forms at the various levels. The junior leaders who are the cutting edge of military effectiveness have to adapt themselves to command a rank and file which is more inquisitive and aware. They will have to disseminate more 'could know' information to their subordinates and be open to their constructive suggestions. While operations and professional duties will be executed in a more open atmosphere, caution needs to be applied to ensure that there is no deviation from the overall aim. The infusion of new ideas at the junior levels will also help in delegation of responsibilities and increase in initiative at junior level. As men and junior leaders become more proactive, this may also help to obviate some of the problems caused by the deficiency of officers.

The middle level leadership again has a pivotal role by acting as an interface between visibly proactive, aware and inquisitive junior rungs with a senior leadership which are a product of different set of circumstances. This balancing or moderating role will also involve encouraging the age-old ethos of the armed forces while curbing any *lassiez-faire* tendencies. They would be required to lead by example and maintain a high degree of personal and professional conduct. They must be seen as the custodians of the honour and the prestige of the services, while at the same time adopting a humane face to the personal and administrative problems of their subordinates. Indeed, much rests on the middle level leadership who are exposed to the perceptions of both the generations.



The senior and the higher level leadership are required to take appropriate policy decisions based on the ground realities and the assigned national security objectives. They should be ready to accommodate changed perceptions without diluting the organisational requirements. They have to become more approachable and delegate responsibilities as well as decision making authority to the appropriate level. With an ear to the ground, they should focus their energies on higher policy decisions and not get involved in petty details. This focus also involves projecting the aspirations of the men in uniform to the political leadership of the nation and cutting across the bureaucratic maze to secure the deserved rights of the services. To engage an entrenched bureaucracy in a cohesive manner, we must present a united front and any inter-service rivalries should be abandoned for common good.

### **INTERNAL MANAGEMENT AND MECHANISMS**

In the recent years many positive steps have been taken by the higher leadership of the Armed Forces, which will have far-reaching implications on the moral and the welfare of its personnel. An ambitious Married Accommodation Project (MAP) has been started which will considerably increase the satisfaction level in term of housing facilities. Also, the Army Welfare Housing Organisation (AWHO) and Air Force Navy Housing Board (AFNHB) have carved a niche for themselves by providing quality housing at an affordable cost.

The Army Group Insurance Fund (AGIF) and Army Welfare Education Society (AWES) are again pioneers in providing insurance cover, inexpensive loans and varied educational opportunities to defence personnel and have made significant contribution in meeting the aspirations of our officers and men. In fact, there is a requirement to further expand the educational facilities at all major stations, particularly of good schools with hostel facilities. Similarly, the Ex-servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) is beginning to make a mark for itself by providing quality medical care to the ex-servicemen. The 'in-house' examples of these professional organisations need to be emulated in other welfare related fields to meet the rising aspirations. Establishments of such autonomous bodies in other arenas like transit facilities and resettlement mechanism may also be explored.



The promotion avenues in the Armed Forces correspondingly decrease as one moves upwards on the ladder. The promotional aspirations of the officers have been addressed to a large extent by the partial implementation of Ajai Vikram Singh Committee report and the proposed Phase II will bolster the same. Similarly, some steps have been taken in form of Assured Career Progression (ACP) in respect of men which need to be further evolved. However, much requires to be still done in the field on establishing an effective grievance redressive mechanism, the absence of which is forcing an increased numbers of service personnel to the civil courts. Again, the recent approval for the Armed Forces Tribunal is a step in the right direction. Reasonable promotional opportunities; objective assessment system with some weightage to mutual assessment and an autonomous redressive mechanism will definitely enhance job satisfaction levels.

The Armed Forces are an essentially hierarchal structure where the basic grain is selection and not socialism. This is an organisational requirement and there cannot be a mass proliferation of senior ranks. Thus, there is a need to absorb its personnel at the middle level into the Central Police Organisations (CPOs) and the Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). This permanent absorption will be a symbiotic relationship as these organisations shall benefit from the varied experience and ingrained values of these ex-servicemen who are still within the working age and retain considerable enthusiasm. On the other hand, the cadre management of the Armed Forces will become relatively streamlined. These personnel should preferably be exposed to requisite orientation or management courses before they hang their uniform to begin another career. Today, the Armed Forces personnel are in considerable demand even in the corporate, industrial and services sector. While some demand is directly linked to the technical skills as in case of the pilots or in the Merchant Navy, the corporate India has now woken up to the inherent strengths including uncompromising ethics of the Armed Forces personnel which are at a premium in an increasingly materialistic society. Thus, the recent tie-up with reputed management institutes including the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) for pre-release courses is a beginning in the right direction. This will also make the Short Service Commission (SSC) an attractive option for the talented youth of the country.



Though the pay package in any government service cannot match the private sector as such, there is a need for revision of the same as the cost of living has sharply shot up in the recent years along with a tempting accessibility to other material comforts of life. It is for the higher leadership of our Defence Forces to bring the issue to a logical conclusion in the recently announced Sixth Pay Commission. However, this much hyped issue is not our *raison d'être* as the Armed Forces are a way of life rather than merely being another job with a regular pay. We can continue to draw the right talent and retain our core values by making the right organisational changes.

There are certain other issues which need to be given due emphasis to preserve our culture and the core values in these times of change. First and foremost, we must treat every person as a unique individual who needs to be treated differently within the given constraints of service. In fact, senior officers and the organisation as such must develop positive institutional or personal relationship with the rank and file of their command. Secondly, any activities which do not constitute our core activities viz. operations and training should be curbed and men given adequate time to enhance their educational and professional skills or to look after their families. The pre-Independence concept of keeping the troops always occupied is a *passé* in the changed circumstances. Thirdly, due focus should be given on educating our personnel on financial matters. They can be guided on basic investment decisions including small savings, insurance cover and housing. These subjects should no longer be considered a taboo at any level. Last but not the least, unnecessary paperwork and 'showbiz' needs to be curtailed. It may be also pointed out that Microsoft Power Point is merely a presentation tool and not an end in itself. Thus, a reduction in these non-core indulgences will free our energies to carry out realistic training to further the military skills. The overall aim of all these proposed changes is to ensure that our efforts are focused on the 'man behind the gun' and there is a continued strengthening of his moral fibre and the technical skills.

## CONCLUSION

Societal change is an inevitable phenomenon which affects all organisations with varying degrees of impact. The organisations with adequate flexibility and foresight are able to adapt quickly and



innovate means to utilise the change for furthering their aims. A young and vibrant India has begun its long march towards economic prosperity and the associated socio-economic changes have caused some turmoil in the established values of the society. This has posed unique challenges for the Armed Forces which can be turned into an opportunity by adapting to changes rather than to let the changes present a *fait accompli*. The adoption of a positive environmental culture and acceptance of new ideas, within our organisational terms of reference, can infuse more energy and dynamism in the Armed Forces. Positive steps have already been initiated in the right direction. The need of the hour is to be able to foresee tomorrow with the eyes of today and channelise the changed societal perceptions towards our unchanged organisational objective.

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