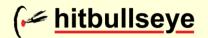# TOPIC OF THE WEEK

JULY'19 (18 to 24 Jul)

Accountability and Ethics

It's truly said," people whose head is bowed down for the country is the most useful head"- army is not only a profession but also a lifestyle. Asking about the importance of Indian Army in India is like asking the importance of heart in a human body. It would not be wrong to say that there would be no India without Indian Army. It is the backbone of the country. It is also one of the few institutions left in the country which could be considered as completely neutral and reliable. If anything goes really wrong in the country, we look at the army for solutions, be it riot control, counter insurgency, fighting terrorism, fighting Naxalites and even getting medals in international sporting events. Military life can be challenging for soldiers and their families. In addition to the typical day-to-day challenges that all people face, this population experiences unique stresses related to military life, such as the frequent moves and military deployments generated by more than a decade. The military is tasked with something serious, the goal is simply to defend the lives and property of the countrymen. In other words, the focus is on people instead of profits. Civilian employers are fundamentally

different from the military because their animating goals are different. And their goals often do not prioritize their workers' well-being.

The Indian nation state has, however, forgotten Chanakya's advice. The Indian soldier today stands at the crossroads, confused about his status in the society and unsure about his own role in a nation led by "faux peaceniks" who will compromise national security for short-term gains like a Nobel Peace Prize. The havoc wrought by an indifferent polity and insensitive bureaucracy to India's armed forces and changing societal norms, has hit the ordinary soldier hard. The society no longer respects the soldier and his work in protecting the nation. They may pay lip service in times of crisis but that's it. Bihar politician Bhim Singh's utterly tasteless remark that "people join armed forces to die," in the wake of the killing of five Indian soldiers on the line of control, is symptomatic of the bitter reality. Although forced to withdraw his remark, the Bihar politician symbolizes how a large section of Indian society view soldiering.

In an odd but fundamental way, most Indians love the Indian Army, but refuse to analyse it. We adhere to the separation of civil society and army so strictly that we do

not look at the strains, tensions and challenges our army is facing. The army is a value creating institution. The old ideal of unity and diversity was achieved only by one institution -- the army. It used ethnicity and tradition to create a national unity. Where else can you summon Sikhs, Gurkhas Jats, Rajasthanis, Marathas and use their different traditions and create an elaborate unity. The Indian Army has to get ready not only to fight the next war, but the next peace. Think of a few facts, jawans in our army retire at 30, most officers by 50. This idea of retirement is based on a dated idea of physical fitness. Given improvements in longevity, exercise and nutrition, one has to quietly ask why army personnel should retire so quickly. Can we not revise the standards of health especially in a force where technology is more or as important as physical stamina and skill? Arguing that retired soldiers contribute to society does not answer the question. We have to ask why the bureaucracy or academics should continue till 65, even 70, when the army retires so early. It makes little sense.

Secondly, let us be clear that the army has not been able to plan the civilian transition. One sees officers stumbling to obtain jobs as security officers, or officers or desperately pass management courses. There is a

tremendous loss of dignity even a sense of loss, a sense of being betrayed or let down by army, government and society. It is tragic that a soldier should retire at 50 and spend twenty five additional years feeling professionally vulnerable. There is sadness here and a major sociological problem that the Department of Defense is indifferent about. The army as a planned organized body is completely helpless about the civilian transition. Its career decisions amputate or bifurcate the lives of its own people.

A most peculiar order was passed within a few days of the new Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman taking over (the fourth change in three years of the last government!). The army was ordered to clear garbage left by tourists. While the army hierarchy, acting as the proverbial sacrificial lambs, meekly accepted it, there was furore among the veterans, and in the social media. They rightly stated that at no given moment should the country's military be deployed to tackle something as opposite to their line of duties as garbage collection. Why are local civil government institutions/officials shirking their responsibility? However, because of efforts of the army and not the government, there is better appreciation of the army and the tasks it performs for the

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nation. There is a definite need to reduce deploying the army on internal tasks, so that they get adequate time to train for their primary task, and also have a better quality of life. As India rises in stature economically and technologically towards a more eminent position in the region and the world, it has to concurrently build on its military power. The political leadership must take this issue seriously, lest the country is found napping when 'push comes to shove'! An open sociology of the army is a democratic necessity. An openness of information is a necessity of the army of the future fighting the next peace and next war on behalf of society.

For reference:-

➢ https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/12/military-versus-private-sector/422124/
➢ https://www.fairobserver.com/region/central_south_asia/indian-armys-role-nation-building/
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➢ https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/modernising-indian-army-future-challenges/

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Additional Readings:-

- https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/14/the-guardian-view-on-private-schools-the-rich-secede-from-the-rest
- https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/16/the-guardian-view-on-scottish-drug-deaths-put-health-and-safety-first
- https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/losing-steam/article28335534.ece
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