CHAPTER 13

ALIENATION SYNDROME
13. THE ALIENATION SYNDROME

General

13.1. From times immemorial, the Indian society has always been divided into four distinct groups, viz., Brahmins, Vaishyas, Sudras and Kshatriyas. Whereas the distinction between the first three categories has narrowed down, Kshatriyas are still as a class by itself which is distinct and alienated from the civil life. They have been a distinct community by themselves and have generally lived isolated lives.

The Social Alienation

13.2. The Indian society has imbued the soldier with sterling qualities of character such as patriotism, integrity, courage and self-sacrifice. Some lapses of character may be acceptable amongst civilians; they have no place in a soldier. These aspects are the soul and substance of existence of a soldier. The aspect that a soldier is expected to have a higher sense of duty and moral character than his civilian counterpart is difficult to understand from purely psychological point of view. From the two men who are brought up in identical situations, the one who joins Army is expected to propel himself to higher, ethical psychological plane than the other. The other person continues in the same environment adopting the existing and prevalent ethical values of the society. The ethical threshold of the soldier and his civilian counterpart are at different levels and at constant conflict with each other. This has tremendous impact on the soldier’s psyche who is continuously and subconsciously being lured to drop guard. Patience of some gives way resulting in lowering of ethical threshold especially in the senior rank. It therefore goes without saying that if the soldier has to maintain highest ethical codes his reputation and prestige needs to be built up to make him feel morally superior in society.

13.3 A soldier makes the supreme sacrifice of life not for pay or that he is more patriotic than civilians it is because of his belief that he is a superior being and cannot let himself down in the eyes of the nation. So how does one inculcate and nourish this feeling in a soldier in peacetime? Not long ago the officer cadre was considered the cream of the country, which saw to it that, in the eyes of the people the military officers’ dignity and prestige were maintained at the highest level. However the standard of living of the yesteryears is a thing of the past and now the privilege of industry. In no other profession the
feeling of superiority is more important than in the fighting services. After all the soldier barters his life for the nation. It is extremely important that this feeling of superiority amongst the soldiers has to be nurtured by a grateful nation. And the effort has to be seen to be believed in the form of tangible benefits to the soldier and his dependants. His dependants need to be looked after with due care and affection. The soldier in uniform especially the retired soldiers should not only be revered in war but also in peacetime. When he comes back home on leave and looks for a piece of land to construct a dwelling unit he too like his civilian counterpart has to go through layers of civilian bureaucracy and by the time is able to make some headway he has to get back to duty. It is then left to his old parents or dependants to try and attempt cross all the obstacles. This leaves tremendous strain on the soldier at work place. When he goes on leave to his home after a hard outing at work place he finds that he is accorded no special privileges by the civilian administration and is often faced with courses of action which if he follows would be unethical in nature. He finds a lackadaisical approach on part of the government agencies in dealing with his problems. He is also aware that in so far as their recruitment to the armed forces is concerned the supply often exceeds the demand. And herein lies the catch.

13.4 The problem is more acute with the condition of war widows and disabled soldiers. It is a known fact that due to social alienation, in spite of best efforts by the armed forces, the condition of war widows and disabled soldiers in their native places is far from satisfactory. The government through the local administration has to make concerted efforts not only to change the mindset of the local populace but also to leave no stone unturned in making their life comfortable. The war heroes need to be given a very special place in the society. They have to be placed on a pedestal which is much higher than an ordinary mortal. It is only then that the quality of the youth joining the armed forces will rise considerably.

13.5 The military establishment is a reflection of the civilian social culture. In this respect, the popular demand of equality of treatment grows with the industrialization of the nation. As the standard of living rises tolerance for the discomfort of Army life decreases. There is a widespread belief among military professionals, that their standard of living has not been adequately maintained. The place of secondary importance to which the society relegates military affairs in peacetime means inevitably, that the best of brains and the most enterprising and ambitious young men would not seek to make the profession of arms as their career. This ostracism by society has now reached a stage, where the soldier finds last place in the marriage market.
The Career Alienation

13.6 Today there is reluctance on part of the youth to join the armed forces. The following discernible changes in trend have been noticed:

13.6.1 A number of vacancies of NDA, IMA and OTA are at times undersubscribed.

13.6.2 A major percentage of the candidates are in the lowest acceptable grade.

13.6.3 Today a large percentage of children of JCO and NCO or those who do not make the grade for university education find a place in the premier Army training institutions of our country. A very small percentage of children of serving or retired officers opt for the services.

13.7 Cream of the society is definitely not opting for the armed forces as their first choice. 20 to 30 years ago this was not the case. The researcher himself joined the armed forces as a first choice. Prior to that it was the norm that the children of Army officers and royal families will join the Armed Forces. The situation has dramatically changed. Today the youth talks of the career in terms of growth and pay packages. Both these aspects are at a discount in the Armed Forces. A debate has always raged in the Armed Forces as to how to make career in the Armed Forces more attractive. Of and on the government has made efforts. Obviously, it is not sufficient. The issue of demand versus supply again is of relevance here and it reflects on the attitude on part of the men in chair. Until and unless the threshold of minimum ethical standards of the youth joining the Armed Forces is of a higher order the Army will continue to face ethical dilemmas at work place.

13.8 There has been a steady increase in the officers seeking premature retirement and most of them do to seek better career prospects outside. Exit of a large number of experienced officers is a heavy drain on the manpower resources of the services. The uncertain future in the Army due to lack of adequate career opportunities has an adverse influence on the morale of officers. The stagnation in the middle rank and fear of early retirement creates a syndrome of anxiety psychosis with its detrimental effect on efficiency and productivity. The lack of opportunities in the higher echelons deny the officer his legitimate need causing deep rooted frustration affecting the quality and output of his work. There will definitely be a drop in the level of dedication towards the profession. And here in
lies the catch. The loss of dedication could lead to wavering of the mind and subsequent loss of basic minimum ethical threshold of that individual.

13.9 A vast number of officers do not get even one merit-based promotion and are left aside in the stream. Their rejections for higher rank notwithstanding they still do represent a large disciplined and experienced workforce. Career alienation in this category is the largest amongst all. The top hierarchy of the organisation lacks focus in so far as this category of officers is concerned. Concerted efforts on part of top hierarchy and government are definitely lacking to ensure the job satisfaction of such individuals. For years this issue is being paid lip service and brushed under the carpet as a non issue. Result - a disgruntled senior lot of officers some of whom tend to abandon their ethical moorings. All these aspects are no longer hidden to the youth today. He sees this as a major drawback in the system and is extremely reluctant to opt for it unless he has no other option in the highly competitive market today.

13.10 Today, both the officers and men come to the Army for careers and depend only on their pay and allowances for their livelihood. Problem of rehabilitation of soldiers thrown out at an early stage is very real, which merits urgent consideration. The British skilfully honoured their position in society to attract high standard of recruits. Even today no one wants to seriously address the issue of a soldier retiring early. Imagine a soldier retiring at 35 or 40 years of age and then looking for a second career outside. Generally speaking he does not have the requisite technical and professional qualifications which are required in private enterprises. Most soldiers get absorbed in lowly paid jobs such as security guards of a company. As such the unemployment levels in this country are very high and the very thought of a second career option midway in life of a soldier presents a very disturbing picture.

13.11 One of the strongest motivating factors in any organisation is the urge of an individual to reach his full potential and level of confidence. The Army is the only service where even officers who have been graded high in CR have had to retire, as there just isn’t sufficient space at the top. This does cause deep-rooted frustration which affects the quality and output of work of a soldier. Interim measures such as officers retiring minimum at the level of rank of colonel are at best temporary and do not address the problem in a holistic manner. Such measures have to be associated with measures to enrich the job content otherwise the dissatisfaction levels will remain generally at the same level where it was
earlier. It is essential to fulfil self-esteem needs of individuals to ensure the highest level of
dedication towards the profession and along with it highest standards of ethics at work place.

13.12 In any future war, the soldier will gladly again make the supreme sacrifice to
safeguard the security of the nation. The nation in turn owes it to the soldier to give him
security of service during peace. The present career pattern does not give him that.

The Cantonment Alienation

13.13 Before Independence, the military invariably stayed in cantonments, which were
always looked upon as the bastion of British rule in India. The British setup these isolated
cantonments for the Indian Army, and did not encourage fraternising with the local
populace. The aim was manifold - one was to ensure that the soldiers were insulated from
the wave of civil disobedience and secondly as they had to rule over the country by the
Indian soldiers which was feasible only if these two communities were kept separated. They
were entity by themselves and remained separate from the mainstream of national
aspirations and culture. A strong set of customs, and traditions, were established,
symbolising the desired ethos. These were followed and enforced rigorously. Although the
word 'cantonment' has been more commonly associated with military stations in India it has
been frequently used in the USA, where a military cantonment is synonymous with term
military post, where troops are assembled, where military stores are kept, etc. A cantonment
means the temporary quarters of troops when taking part in manoeuvres. However, in India
it is referred to as permanent military station.

13.14 The fundamental difference between the location and the administration of the
cantonment in our country and other countries was that in the case of the latter these were
located strictly from the point of view of training and away from big towns. In India,
cantonments were invariably located adjacent to big cities and garrisoned for frontier
defence and internal security role. The most important result of the divergence between the
civilian egalitarianism and military professionalism was an increased isolation of the Army
from the rest of Indian life. The Army life was as different from the rest of the country in so
far as attitudes and beliefs were concerned. However valuable this may be to the growth of
military professionalism the consequent isolation was scarcely an unalloyed blessing. Except
in occasional natural calamities, which brought some rapport between Army and people, the
regular Army was sufficiently isolated in cantonments to resemble a monastic order,
isolated, often physically as it patrolled disturbed streets of cities.
13.15 A lot has changed since Independence. The Indian armed forces continued on the same lines, but with the passage of time, the isolation began to break down. *This was the result of the combination of many factors such as development, which involved the expansion of towns and cities to the immediate proximity of the cantonments; the increased number of persons joining the armed forces from both rural and urban areas, exerting a strain on the selection system; and increased interaction with civilian elements of society for the multifarious needs of the services.*  

13.16 There are no distinct geographic boundaries separating cantonments from civil inhabited areas except in remote localities. However, the nature of work of a soldier today continues to be a cause of his psychological isolation being insulated from civilian culture. The audio-visual media today is literally bombarding the mind of a soldier whereupon he gets further confused and dejected at times. This does affect his work behaviour. Restrictions on his movement, contact with civilians (due to any reasons) etc., does increase the gulf between the two.

13.17 It is not feasible today to totally prevent contact of the community of soldiers with the civilians except in field or operational areas. Even here due to the nature of work in C I operations contact with civilians is but a natural outcome. The soldier today sees materialism creeping in the society and he too does not remain totally unaffected. His wants and needs too have increased but he is unable to keep pace with the society. It is here that a section of the soldiers in uniform lose focus and drop guard. Unethical behavioural pattern creeps in leading to corruption at various levels. The challenges on leadership today are enormous - firstly the leaders themselves have to rise above temptations and secondly prevent their command from doing so.

**The Political Alienation**

13.18 The Army is required to stay aloof and not, in any way, get involved with the political ideology of the government in power. A soldier's commitment has always been to the words of Lord Chetwode. Although this worked well under a colonial role and aptly suited to the professional requirement of the Army, the question that arises today, is whether under the present environment in the country emphasising social justice in the true sense, is it possible for any soldier to remain totally divorced from the political ideology in power? After all war is an instrument of politics.

---

13.19 Democracy pre-supposes only such citizens, who make a comparative study of ideologies of different political parties and support one or the other on the basis of convictions formed. It is a great irony that the curriculum in our Army training institutions do not include detailed study of principal ideologies, resulting in the educated soldier remaining uneducated in this vital sphere. The fact is that the political system and ideologies have now become a part and parcel of our daily living and in the environment we work. It has permeated into almost all facets of our professional and cultural life, and the Army can no longer pretend to remain outside the system and yet be effective as it has been possible hitherto fore. The Army has to learn to live with the system and be committed to it also.

13.20 *There is a loss of professionalism as a military officer moves closer to civilian values and becomes less alienated from the parent society*\(^2\). Morris advises officers to study international relations at the very outset of their careers. Future of military profession rests on a balance between organisational stability and adaption to rapid technological and political change. In modern times, the Army has been reluctant to become involved in internal strife which often involves the Army in short-term political conflict and is seen as detracting from its inability to perform as the guardian of the nation.

13.21 The alienation of a soldier from the society engineered or otherwise has its negative effects on the psyche of a soldier thereby in some form or other affecting his work performance. While on one hand ban on discussion of politics by soldiers is justified as the Army is apolitical, on the hand can anyone deny that the level of awareness on this issue is as good, if not more, than the civilian counterpart? The soldier therefore either discusses issues with himself or in private with his subordinates. It must be understood that he can no longer be kept in psychological isolation which is not practical. Young boys and girls today are fully aware of sex but sex education in schools is vehemently opposed by a number of people. It is just that we do not want to term the word obvious as obvious.

13.22 It is an irony that while the soldiers are allowed to vote they are forbidden to discuss politics! And on top of it he is unable to vote due to faulty system of postal ballots. Also it is a known fact that politics is beyond the scope of military competence. Military personnel must remain neutral politically. *“The military Cdr must never allow his military judgement to be warped in political expediency”*\(^3\).

\(^2\) Morris Janowitz.
\(^3\) *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute* 99: 37.