CHAPTER 16

NAVAL AND AIR FORCE PERSPECTIVES
16. NAVAL AND AIR FORCE PERSPECTIVES

16.1 Army, Navy and Air Force are the major arms of the Indian defence establishment. This treatise is entitled ‘Management of the changing scenario of ethical environment in the Indian Army’. All chapters up till now have carried out an in-depth analyses of various issues pertaining to the Indian Army. The researcher is of the considered opinion that for a holistic and comprehensive appraisal of the issue under scrutiny it would be appropriate at this stage to obtain an insight into the situation as existing in the other two arms of the Indian defence establishment and that is; Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force. It is through comparison that gainful lessons can be derived which can aid and assist the researcher in formulating recommendations. By placing all the three services on one canvass and analysing related issues the researcher aims to reach to meaningful conclusions in the correct perspective which would be all encompassing and wide ranging.

NAVY

16.2 The Indian Navy is smaller in size as compared to the Army but larger than the Air Force. It has its origins in British India. A small fleet comprised the Royal Indian Navy. Initially the officer component were British later Indian officers were sent to the UK for training.

Basic Structure

16.3 Basic functioning of the Navy is as follows:

16.3.1 The fighting elements are the moving platforms that is the ships and submarines.

16.3.2 The Navy comprises of the offshore components and the onshore components.

16.3.3 The teeth to tail ratio in the Navy is low with the tail being large.

16.3.4 Major maintenance of the ships/submarines is carried out on shore when they are in harbour.

16.3.5 Following are the main components on board a ship/submarine:

(i) The executive branch.
(ii) The electrical and the weapons branch.

(iii) The logistics branch.

16.3.6 The ship/submarine is commanded by a commanding officer who has a second in command and is supported by the officer cadre. The command of the CO comprises of the sailors and the petty officers.

16.3.7 Due to multidisciplinary skills and duality of trades the level of education amongst the sailors is high.

16.3.8 Role of petty officers (JCO) are to act as a link between the officers and the sailors.

16.3.9 There is a deficiency of officers in the Navy.

16.3.10 Except for the submarines and the aviation branch there is no system of belonging and regimental spirit on ships as an individual once posted from ship one to another does not necessarily get posted back to the parent ship.

16.3.11 The pride of an individual is associated with the type of ship or the submarine.

16.3.12 On the submarine the officers and sailors eat the same food prepared from the same galley whereas on ships different galleys exists for different personnel. Therefore the intermingling of officers and sailors is more in submarines.

The Environment Within

16.4 The ethos and value system in the Navy basically revolves around the following aspects:

16.4.1 Be proud of men.

16.4.2 Men are an important human resource.

16.4.3 Know the men, support the men and root out the black sheep.

16.4.4 The culture of small ships and big ships such as aircraft carrier are different wherein on small ships personnel know each other whereas on larger floating platforms the relationships are more impersonal.
16.4.5 The core values in the Navy are getting diluted today.

16.4.6 Yesmanship and sycophancy also exist in the Navy though at a smaller level as compared to the Army. Supersession is prevalent in the Navy also but the level of disgruntlement is comparatively lower as there are lateral avenues available for such personnel to move out to Merchant Navy or to other avenues within the organization.

16.4.7 A large number of personnel in the Navy with whom the researcher interacted were of the opinion that basic core values should not be modified though these values are being greatly influenced by the chaotic state of the society.

16.4.8 The threat to ethos of the Navy is largely due to deficiencies in higher leadership. The other reasons in order of priority are attitude of the officer cadre, deficiency in the system and impact of external influences.

16.4.9 In the Navy the percentage of situations wherein superior stands by his subordinate is larger than the Army.

16.4.10 In the Navy cutthroat competition and CR culture is causing harm to the ethical environment.

16.4.11 Due to the nature of work on board a ship or submarine the style of functioning of the boss is largely participative wherein large levels of transparency are maintained.

16.4.12 The channel of communication in the ship or the submarine follows the laid down command structure.

16.4.13 Due to the functioning parameters on board a ship/submarine, the system of feedback is strong wherein there is no scope of junior leadership to hide anything from superiors.

16.4.14 The zero error syndrome in the Navy is less as compared to the Army though the tolerance levels in the Navy too have reduced over a period of time.

16.4.15 On board a Ship/Submarine appropriate decentralisation exists otherwise lack of it could lead to tremendous hindrances in running of the vessel.
16.4.16 In the Navy too there is a small percentage of officers who suffer a credibility gap with their men.

16.4.17 In the Navy the percentage of forthright officers is larger amongst the junior rank as compared to the senior lot. Forthrightness as a character quality is prevalent on ships or submarines as it is a functional requirement.

16.4.18 In the Navy personnel obey primarily due to needs of the organization.

16.4.19 The CO is primarily responsible for maintenance of healthy climate in his command.

16.4.20 The trend of questioning the rationale of orders given to the sailors is on the rise.

16.4.21 The man management of sailors is more complex today as compared to what existed earlier. The sailor is no more a simple person as one saw decades ago.

16.4.22 There are cases of overstay of shore leave and the sailor is found to be under more stressful conditions. The challenges on the leadership are far larger today.

16.4.23 Transparency is the single most biggest factor on which good officer man relationship is based in the Navy.

16.4.24 Dignity at work is the main ingredient of a successful officer man relationship.

16.4.25 In the Navy there is a lot of space for individuality of the sailors as compared to the Army. On board a ship a sailor has a distinct identity as compared to his counterparts on the dockyards.

16.4.26 The younger generation joining the Navy today is more softer as compared to their counterparts decades ago. The primary reason for this decline is due to awareness of greater avenues and materialistic tendencies. The leadership is not fully able to check this declining trend.
16.4.27 The commitment of the petty officers (JCO) is not up to the desired level due to lack of accountability and drop in level of motivation the moment an individual becomes a petty officer.

16.4.28 The Navy too is not free of abuse of power at all levels of command.

16.4.29 There are increased tendencies of excessive partying on board the ship while in harbour which does not go down well with the sailors under deck.

16.4.30 The deficiency of officers is having its negative effect on the functioning on board a ship.

AIR FORCE

16.5 The Indian Air Force is comparatively a younger and much smaller arm as compared to the Indian Army. It was sometime in the early thirties that the Royal Air Force of the United Kingdom starting functioning alongside the British Indian Army in British India. This arm was christened the Royal Indian Air Force. The pilots were initially British, it is only later that Indian pilots were sent to the UK for training. Main operational commitments of the RIAF were in the Burma campaigns. The Air Force primarily consists of two elements namely, the fighting element and the maintenance element. Fighting squadrons are grouped together under bases. Maintenance elements are grouped with the squadrons and also with the bases.

Basic Characteristics

16.6 Important characteristics of the Air Force are given below:

16.6.1 The fighting element of the Air Force are the pilots.

16.6.2 Balance of the manpower comprising of the technical and the maintenance staff are at the bases and airfields at the rear detached from situations of actual combat.

16.6.3 Except for the threat of the missiles, long range artillery and enemy aircraft to the airfields a major portion of the Air Force are at a large distance from the battlefield.
16.6.4 The casualty rate of the pilots both during operations and during peace times has always been high.

16.6.5 OR of the Air Force suffer almost no casualties.

16.6.6 There is limited interaction between the officers (pilots) and the men.

16.6.7 Most of the bases are in close proximity to civilian inhabited areas due to logistic considerations.

16.6.8 There is a greater amount of informal relationship between the officers and the men due to the nature of the job as the lives of the pilots are at constant risk. Air worthiness of the aircraft is the responsibility of the technical personnel.

16.6.9 Men who maintain aircraft are specialists in their fields who take pride in maintaining the aircraft.

16.6.10 The fighting component of the Air Force is not directly connected with the technical component.

16.6.11 The squadron Cdr and the base Cdr are more intimately involved with the pilots as compared to the men.

16.6.12 The technical officer is responsible for the maintenance of the aircraft and has a greater level of interaction with the men.

16.6.13 The administration of the men is looked after by the chief administrative officer located at the base.

16.6.14 There is no such thing as regimentation in the Air Force as compared to the Army. The men and officers are transferred from one squadron to another and it is not necessary for an individual to return to the original squadron. Therefore a sense of belonging is not there.

16.6.15 Each squadron is known to have squadron spirit which is stimulated by various trophies awarded for various disciplines.

16.6.16 In the Air Force prestige of an individual is associated with the type of
aircraft one is working with.

Service Culture

16.7 There is a great amount of uncertainty amongst the fighting elements of the Air Force. In the first World War the missions undertaken by the RIAF were primarily reconnaissance and air to air missions. Later on in the second World War bombers were more predominant. The casualty rate was high bringing along with it a lot of anxiety amongst the pilots and their families. The eventual result was that the pilots developed a care free attitude towards life. This is the culture which was inherited by the Indian Air Force.

The Ethical Environment

16.8 The environment in the Air Force has different shades and colours. The value systems in place attain different dimensions at different levels. Salient features of this environment are as follows:

16.8.1 The prestige of a pilot, as stated earlier is associated with the type of aircraft flown by that pilot. It is these pilots who are the cream of the Air Force. Better pilots are sent to better, state of the art aircraft. The other pilots are the disadvantaged ones leading to frustration.

16.8.2 Sycophancy is also prevalent in the Air Force but has different dimensions which are as follows:

(i) The problem of low levels of objectivity in the reporting system of confidential reports also exists in the Air Force.

(ii) Sycophancy is minimal amongst the pilots as goodness and professional competence gets recognised. There are external independent agencies that also assess the pilots in addition to the assessment being done by the immediate boss of the officer. These checks and balances in the system are strong enough to deter a reporting officer to be biased in reporting. Aberrations however do take place.

(iii) Sycophancy is more predominant in the senior levels where more subtle forces are at play. Technical proficiency and professionalism at the senior level get overshadowed by character traits of yessmanship and sycophancy.
The Air Force officers especially the pilots have the scope of getting absorbed in the civilian airlines. Due to availability of lateral avenues the tendency to indulge in extreme levels of sycophancy is reduced.

16.8.3 The boon in the civil aviation sector is having its effects on the Air Force and the danger of movement of the pilots especially in the transport and the helicopter wings to the civil airlines is real.

16.8.4 Abuse of power in the Air Force does exist but comparatively to a lesser degree as compared to Army as opportunities in terms of resources are less.

16.8.5 Up to the level of wing Cdr generally speaking the promotions are largely merit based thereafter various other issues come into play.

16.8.6 Traditionally the focus in the Air Force has been on flying. Not much emphasis has been laid on man-management techniques or for that matter on such aspects as strategic thinking and other related issues. It is only of late that officers are being exposed to such issues.

16.8.7 In the Air Force there is a lot of centralised control of various issues including man-management. The squadron Cdr for example has very little say in decision making processes.

16.8.8 The Air Force is also characterised by the steep pyramidal structure, therefore a certain amount of cut throat competition exists especially in the senior levels.

16.8.9 There is not much authority vested in the junior officer cadre due to centralisation of authority.

16.8.10 Informal channels of communication dominate the spectrum of the functioning in the Air Force. Grapevine as a channel of communication is less prevalent.

16.8.11 In the Air Force the atmosphere is more relaxed wherein zero error syndrome is less predominant as compared to the Army.
16.8.12 In the Air Force the system of moderation at the level of the reporting officers is more efficacious as compared to the Army. There is limited scope of unilateral destruction of careers at the level of the initiating officers.

16.8.13 There is limited interaction between the officers and airmen especially the pilots. The qualities of leadership are therefore not as developed which get pronounced at the senior level.

16.8.14 Due to the nature of work discipline is not as stringently enforced as it in the Army.

16.8.15 There are signs of reduction in the risk taking ability as also growth of careerism in the Air Force.

16.8.16 The effects of low quality of intake are also seen in the Air Force.

16.8.17 As compared to the JCO rank in the Indian Army the equivalent rank in the Air Force that is Master Warrant Officer is required as in the absence of active participation in managing affairs of the men by the officers it is this rank which handles affairs.

16.8.18 In Air Force ethics at times is a casualty wherein it is a mere reflection of the personality of the boss.

16.8.19 It is not necessary that military leaders of highest character reach the highest rungs of hierarchy.

16.8.20 Initiative and innovativeness are not fully encouraged.

16.8.21 In spite of constraints, the Service does recognise individuality of its personnel.

16.8.22 Due to limited involvement of the Air Force in aid to civil authorities interaction between its personnel and the civil administration is less as compared to the Army thereby limiting the scope of ill effects of interference of the bureaucracy.