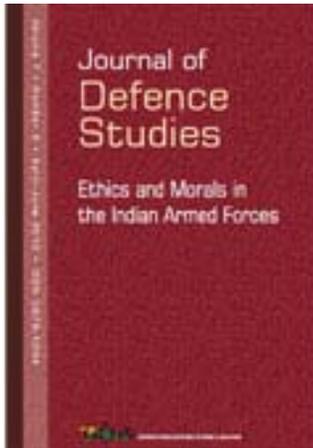


# Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

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Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi-110010



## Journal of Defence Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.idsa.in/journalofdefencestudies>

### Roots of Moral Decline in the Armed Forces: Time to Reclaim our Izzat

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To cite this article: Arun Prakash (2013): Roots of Moral Decline in the Armed Forces: Time to Reclaim our Izzat, Journal of Defence Studies, Vol-7, Issue-2, pp- 11-26

URL: [http://idsa.in/jds/7\\_2\\_2013\\_RootsofMoralDecline\\_aprakash](http://idsa.in/jds/7_2_2013_RootsofMoralDecline_aprakash)

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## Roots of Moral Decline in the Armed Forces Time to Reclaim our *Izzat*

*Arun Prakash\**

*The precipitate decline in moral and ethical values, as well as the steep fall in standards of private and public conduct, in recent years, has been accompanied by a concurrent erosion of values amongst India's military personnel. Consequently, the armed forces, which were once considered exemplars of ethical conduct, discipline and decency, are rapidly slipping in the estimation of their countrymen. The author points out that this moral decline could lead to a loss of cohesion and combat-effectiveness in the armed forces with deleterious implications, not just for national security but also for India's social fabric, of which the 3-4 million soldiers and veterans form an integral constituent. Redemption of the military's honour and restoration to its earlier iconic status is, therefore, considered a national imperative. The author has highlighted specific ethical challenges that could confront officers during their careers and offers practical advice to the armed forces' leadership to tackle these challenges.*

### WHY INTROSPECTION?

India's post-independence social and economic transformation has been accompanied by a decline in moral and ethical values, as well as a steep fall in standards of private and public conduct. Those of us who find themselves in need of a public service, or come in contact with government

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ISSN 0976-1004 print

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*Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, April-June 2013, pp. 11-26



functionaries, realize that corruption has become a way of life. No longer is there a sense of shame attached to being accused or even prosecuted for venality. Corruption has engendered deep frustration in society, and the common man, impatient with the present state of affairs, yearns for change. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly obvious that any societal reform can only emerge from a complete overhaul of India's body politic. This is unlikely to happen in a hurry because Parliament is clearly unwilling and, therefore, unable to make the constitutional changes necessary.

The Indian armed forces, on the other hand, are fortunate that they have always made their own special code of conduct and lived by it. Traditionally perceived as an entity which stood tall above the civil society, the armed forces were seen as an embodiment of order and discipline, and were held, by their compatriots, in respect and admiration. Today we find, to our great dismay, that due to a tangible erosion of values and frequent displays of venality, the armed forces, too, are rapidly slipping in the estimation of their countrymen. For the armed forces to fob off blame for this decay on society and polity is not acceptable. After all, it is the Services who invented phrases such as 'an officer and a gentleman' and 'officer-like conduct'. It were these attributes rather than any Warrant of Precedence which earned them respect and a high place in society.

However, for a moment, if we put aside recent military misdemeanours, a different view would emerge of the post-independence role of the Indian armed forces. This crucial 65-year period has repeatedly shown that India's patriotic and apolitical armed forces have remained the staunchest and most steadfast bulwark of India's secularism and democracy as well as a powerful unifying force for the nation. During this era, as strategic blunders led to repeated adventurism by our neighbours, it was invariably the gallantry and professionalism of the armed forces which saved the nation from disintegration and dishonour. Since the armed forces not only have a key role in safeguarding the Indian state but also occupy a special place in the consciousness of civil society, it becomes a matter of national interest to restore them to their earlier position as leaders and exemplars of honourable and ethical conduct for Indian society.

In passing, a related issue that must be noted is the serious damage being inflicted by the media on the image of the armed forces when they

rush to publish sensational material, including half-truths and even total lies, and brush aside clarifications and denials. It is extremely rare to find a balanced and well-researched article or programme on the armed forces for two reasons. First, the knowledge level of media persons, even of putative 'defence specialists', about national security matters and the armed forces is extremely superficial. Second, the media firmly believes that an armed forces story, unless it reveals a 'scam', 'snafu' or misdemeanour, will not attract public interest.

However, we cannot overlook the fact that public perceptions are important for an institution such as the armed forces; and living with a tarnished image is not only damaging for self-respect and morale but can also become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Moreover, loss of public esteem has deleterious consequences for our jawans and veterans who live in the midst of the general populace, and have to deal frequently with the civil administration and civilians.

A major source of pride and strength for the officer corps of the armed forces used to be the moral high ground that they occupied as upright and incorruptible people. Today, when we hear about officers losing the trust and loyalty of their own jawans, how can fellow citizens be expected to accord respect to the armed forces? That is why it is imperative that the armed forces introspect and reclaim the moral high ground, not just for the *izzat* of the armed forces but also for the good of India's society and in the larger interest of the nation.

Having spoken on and discussed these issues at various venues, I have consolidated, in this article, four decades of experience and personal observation to offer some thoughts on the moral decline in our armed forces and what can be done to stem it.

#### **WHY SOLDIERS NEED TO BE ETHICAL**

Those of us who have the time and inclination for reflection, often wonder as to why society gives a raw deal to the soldier. It first decides to impose the most difficult tasks and responsibilities upon him and then expects him to adhere to the loftiest code of conduct, while everyone else in society seems free to do what he pleases.

Here, we need to keep reminding ourselves that members of the military profession are distinguished from other professionals by a number of factors. The prime amongst them is the concept of what Brigadier Sir John Hackett has termed the 'unlimited liability in defence of the

nation's interests'. This liability includes some pretty unusual things. The military allows for the lawful killing of others in the performance of duty. The responsibility of military leadership also permits the sacrifice of soldiers' lives in order to achieve military objectives. The stark and brutal reality of these differences from normal society has traditionally been a distinguishing feature of military life, contributing to a sense of separateness—even superiority—in relation to the civilian population.

Underlying this isolation from civil society is the need to build mutual trust and esprit de corps, and to ingrain a concept of the 'greater good'. These are not mere phrases. Those who go into combat, or in harm's way, know that mission accomplishment requires them to place blind faith in teamwork, loyalty and professional competence.

As a result of its distinctive mandate and the need to instill organizational loyalty and obedience, military organizations develop a culture unto themselves, distinguished by an emphasis on hierarchy, tradition, rituals and customs as well as distinctive dress and insignias. The adherence to this culture is, largely, voluntary, and soldiers retain their ranks as well as habits and way of life after retirement. Against this backdrop, it is essential that members of the military profession live (and die) by their own code—which must be unique, more honourable and more demanding than any other.

Before coming to the issue of a code, we need to discuss two terms that are frequently used but, perhaps, with inadequate comprehension of their actual import. These are ethics and integrity, and it is worthwhile dwelling briefly on them.

#### ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

The term 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which means custom, habit, character or disposition. At a fundamental level, ethics tell us what is the proper course of action for an individual and answers the question, 'What do I do in a particular set of circumstances?' On a higher plane, it is the method by which we categorize our values and practise them. For example, should we pursue our own happiness or should we make sacrifices for a comrade, an organization or for a greater cause? While most people think that our sense of right and wrong is a gift from God and religion, others believe that the human conscience can, by itself, work out a balance sheet of actions and their moral cost.

The other, related trait is 'integrity', for which there is a column or box in every confidential report (CR) form, filled up by most reporting officers with only a hazy understanding of the nature and nuances of this term. Just as ethics is an external system of concepts and rules which can help steer an individual, integrity is an internal system of principles which guides one's behaviour. *People of integrity are motivated by a strong inner drive that makes them strive for consistently high standards of behaviour, even when no one is watching, and neither reward nor punishment is involved.* Integrity can be termed as the sum of virtues such as reliability, honesty, loyalty, fairness, self-respect, and a sense of honour.

The question that instantly springs to mind is: are ethics and integrity innate to human beings or do they have to be instilled by an external agency? Since the answer may involve a complex debate on Darwinism, I will confine myself to what I have gleaned from my personal experience as the head of a tri-Service training institution, the National Defence Academy (NDA). I focus on the NDA because a significant number of higher ranks in the armed forces are filled by officers trained in this institution, and it is they who provide leadership and example to subordinates and peers. However, the lessons are applicable universally, and flawed products emerging from any of the other Service academies will have an equally adverse impact on the armed forces.

#### THE SEEDS OF MORAL DECLINE

I returned to the NDA, as Commandant, 33 years after I passed out of its portals as a cadet. While the Academy had made huge strides in every aspect of training, and the quality of cadets was better than ever before, I was astonished to note the range and scale of their misdemeanours. Stealing, physical abuse of juniors, cheating in examinations and impersonation were some of the common offences, and it was obvious that most of the offenders had received no inputs about a value system, nor were they provided a moral foundation by parents or teachers.

However, more alarming than the gravity or frequency of transgressions by cadets was the benign and tolerant attitude of the training staff towards such infractions of Academy discipline. These young officers, many of them just a few years out of the Academy themselves, felt that it was desirable for a 'smart' cadet to possess basic 'skills' such as lying, cheating and stealing, since these would not only help him survive the

rigours of Academy training but also make him more effective on the battlefield, especially in the counter-insurgency environment.

After a great deal of discussion and debate, an Honour Code system, supported by the cadets (but largely opposed by the officers), was instituted in the NDA in March 1998. The text of the code was kept short and simple, with its essence contained in the words: ‘...I will not lie, cheat or steal; nor will I mislead or deceive anyone...I undertake to faithfully live up to this code and to continuously encourage my comrades to do so.’

#### A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EVERYONE

A dispassionate examination of the recent trespasses by senior armed forces officers, which have earned the armed forces a bad name—be it for fake encounters, involvement in real estate scams, malfeasance in purchases or venality in contracts and recruitment—points to one fundamental cause: the inability of an individual to distinguish between the ‘easier wrong’ and the ‘harder right’. At the risk of annoying my fellow alumni, I would suggest that many of the unethical traits learnt by a ‘smart’ cadet at an impressionable age, and practised in NDA for three years, mutate into serious character flaws in later life.

These flaws serve to disturb a senior officer’s moral compass and make him prone to serious errors of judgement. As he grows in rank, there are a number of powerful influences at work that try to push a senior officer in the wrong direction. At one level, he has the urge to make his mark and move up the career graph. He also wants to display his material prosperity as a manifestation of his power and authority. At another level, there may be pressure from peers, friends and relatives to make the best use of his position while ‘the going is good’. Most dangerous, perhaps, are staff officers and advisors with flexible morals, always on the lookout for the smallest sign of weakness on the part of the boss. Once he succumbs to temptation, they will gleefully jump on the gravy train.

The Honour Code mentioned earlier may seem appropriate only for youngsters because it mentions, seemingly, minor trespasses. However, a little reflection will show that every single act of moral turpitude that we see today, even at the two- or three-star levels, can be categorized under one of the basic lapses: ‘lying, cheating, stealing, misleading or deceiving’. It was this thought that motivated the Commandant to add this passage

in the Special Academy Order, promulgating the 1998 NDA Honour Code: 'It is my hope and expectation that the Academy Honour Code will remain with a cadet as his creed and guiding light throughout his career and, perhaps, even for the rest of his life.'

Obviously, at this juncture, ours is not a culture or society in which ethical conduct comes naturally. So, if the armed forces are to groom moral and upright people to occupy positions of responsibility, they must ensure correct and thorough indoctrination right from the cadet stage. Once commissioned as officers, they must be incessantly reminded that the military ethos demands the highest levels of ethics and morality from them.

In this context, two propositions deserve serious consideration. First, the basic training syllabi of Service academies should be redesigned to bring sharp focus on ethics, the instilling of a strong value system and the creation of a sound moral foundation for the young entrants. Those who are unable to meet ethical standards laid down by the armed forces must be weeded out—notwithstanding officer shortages. Second, a uniform Honour Code must be created for the officer corps of the Indian armed forces, under the imprimatur of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Having been thoroughly imbibed in the Service academies, this code must continue to provide a moral compass for an officer at every stage, right through his career. Violations of this code must invite not just strong peer disapproval and social ostracization but also career penalties.

With suitable changes, the 1998 NDA Honour Code could form the basis for a credo which will provide a guiding light for the officer corps, in our turbulent society, and bind them in a brotherhood of chivalry and honour.

#### **A HISTORICAL/CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

Having taken a micro-view of the issue, from the Academy level, let us seek a broader perspective. A look at history will show that the fate of nations is decided by the moral fibre of its people. From the Peloponnesian Wars to the Siege of Stalingrad and the Battle of Britain, it was not just the inspiring leadership of people like Pericles, Marshal Zhukov or Winston Churchill, but also the courage, fortitude and perseverance of the citizen-soldier which brought victory. What about the Indian tradition? Do we have a cultural and historical narrative which could form the underpinning of our moral foundation?

The earliest records of Indian culture are the Vedas, dating back to about 2000 or 2500 BCE, and contain, in the words of Nehru, ‘...the unfolding of the human mind in the earliest stages of thought, and were meant to be a collection of the existing knowledge of the day.’ A thousand years later came the Upanishads and the Puranas, taking us a step further in the development of Indo-Aryan thought. They are an enquiry into the truth, regarding the creation of the universe, nature of god and meditation, and contain a philosophic discussion of many profound thoughts.

Then, we have the two great epics of ancient India—Ramayana and Mahabharata—which deal with the early days of the Indo-Aryans, their conflicts, civil wars and conquests. The Bhagavad Gita, an episode of Mahabharata, contains a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Prince Arjuna on the battlefield before the start of the Kurukshetra War. Responding to Arjuna’s ethical and moral dilemma, Lord Krishna explains his duties as a warrior in a ‘*dharma yudha*’ or a just war, and dwells on issues such as individual duty, social conduct and the application of ethics to human affairs.

A key passage from this battlefield sermon, which enjoins commitment without expectation of reward, has enduring significance. In Sanskrit, it reads: ‘*Karmanyē vaadhika raste ma phalesh kadachan. Ma karma phala hetur bhurmatey sangostva akarmanyē*’ (You are bound to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your action. Never seek credit for the results of your activities, and never contemplate not doing your duty). This is a profound message which, if properly understood and implemented, can change the life of an individual and the attitude of a nation.

The fact is that Indians are heirs to an ancient religious and philosophical tradition that contains profound wisdom. However, a look at our past shows that we have not been able to carry forward the legacy of our noble forebears like Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka or Akbar and translate their precepts into actions. One of the more damaging consequences has been our historic inability to throw up a strong, resolute and visionary leadership, which could unite the country against external threats and internal dissension. Consequent subjugation by every invader created its own vicious circle of treachery, betrayal and defeat, with deleterious impact on our national character.

While self-denigration is unhealthy, one cannot escape the conclusion that a historical leadership deficit and lack of moral fibre has been at

the root of most traumas that India has suffered in its turbulent past. It is depressing to read how frequently Indian armies on the verge of victory were let down, either by poor leadership or by treachery, deceit and betrayals from within the ranks. India was conquered for the East India Company by brave Indian sepoys commanded by outstanding British officers, pitted against equally brave Indian sepoys led by corrupt, indolent and spineless Indian rajas and nawabs.

#### **MORAL DILEMMAS AND PITFALLS IN THE ARMED FORCES**

If the preceding discussion sounds familiar today, it is because during the 65 years of independence, our society has been steadily reverting to the traditional Indian archetype, with sycophancy, hypocrisy, duplicity and corruption becoming rampant in all walks of life. Many try to rationalize the phenomenon of falling ethical standards in the armed forces by saying that since they are a product and part of Indian society, their conduct is bound to reflect societal decline.

There is need to firmly reject the seductive comfort of such logic. No matter how the civilian world looks at such issues, for the armed forces there can be neither excuses nor compromises in the arena of ethics and morality. They must, with great deliberation, maintain their state of detachment from civil society. If, as some say, moral uprightness and integrity were British bequests to the armed forces, we must identify even better values from within our own culture and create sound Indian traditions of *imaandari* and *sharafat* for the armed forces to follow.

This article has, so far, confined itself to amorphous aspects of ethics and morality, and dwelt on generalities. Let me now confront reality and address four or five distinct ethical challenges that can confront Service officers during the course of their careers. It is in the overcoming of these moral pitfalls and dilemmas that the redemption of the armed forces' *izzat* lies.

#### **THE FIRST LITTLE (WRONG) STEP**

The edifice of leadership in the armed forces rests very precariously on the fulcrum of credibility. A leader can only lead if his followers have faith in his sincerity and the authenticity of his motives; in other words, his integrity must be beyond doubt. The existing vagueness about integrity

needs to be eliminated because it breeds undesirable ambivalence. Integrity does not come in fractions; it is either all there or is totally absent.

Sooner or later, comes a day in the life of every officer when he stands on the verge of crossing the thin line between honesty and deceit. The distinction will appear to be very fine and the issue may seem quite trivial. Moreover, there will be plenty of people, including family, friends and staff officers, urging him to cross the line, and providing him with convincing rationales for it. When caught in such a dilemma, there is only one thought to be borne in mind: no matter how minor the infringement, once the mental barrier between right and wrong is demolished, the human mind is, thereafter, able to justify dishonesty on an ever-increasing scale.

It is increasingly becoming apparent that men in uniform are essentially decent, upright and honourable, till their moral fibre is put to test by a sufficiently large temptation. Those who are fortunate may never face such a test, but many who have dealings with civil firms, suppliers and contractors, or make local purchases and handle large discretionary funds, often succumb without a major fight.

It may not be appropriate to name the branches, arms and services of the three armed forces which face this hazard on a daily basis, but serious consideration must be given to their restructuring so as to reduce exposure of uniformed personnel to non-military activities. Such organizations could either be civilianized or their functions outsourced. In any case, closest vigil must be maintained on their functioning by the Services themselves and proper guidance must be provided to individual officers serving in these organizations.

#### **LACK OF MORAL COURAGE**

Servicemen are required to demonstrate abundant courage in both its manifestations: physical as well as moral. Physical courage is an admirable and uncommon attribute which motivates soldiers to perform deeds of heroism, and yet moral courage is a rarer quality and calls for a different set of virtues. It requires one to stand firm on values, principles and convictions regardless of the consequences. It shows up best in the face of adverse circumstances, and the highest form of moral courage is to accept responsibility for your decisions, especially when things go wrong either due to your subordinates or due to adverse circumstances.

Many of our ethical dilemmas arise because of a lack of moral courage. Culturally, Indians are a very polite people and far more deferential to rank and age than necessary—often to the point of servility. Conventional wisdom in India says that if the harsh or unpleasant truth is likely to upset your superior then just keep providing him good news, whether true or not. The hazards of such an attitude are obvious; it not only creates moral cowards and liars but also deludes the superior into believing all is well while sitting on a volcano.

The readiness of an officer to convey his thoughts in a frank and forthright manner to his superior, keeping his words free from prejudice or malice, is a trait to be valued and encouraged. At the same, as they rise in rank, officers must cultivate the strength of character and breadth of mind to be able to hear harsh and unpalatable truths without shooting the messenger.

The inability to convey the unvarnished truth and unpleasant news to one's superiors seems to inflict the higher ranks more than others. In the Service Headquarters (HQs), one discovers that the comprehension levels are lower and tolerance for bad news even less at the political and bureaucratic levels. It often requires all of one's resources of moral courage to place matters in the correct perspective firmly but politely to a minister or a bureaucrat.

#### **SYCOPHANCY**

One of the most corrosive and demoralizing phenomena, which can undermine the ethical foundations of any organization, is sycophancy and its obnoxious offshoots like parochialism and cronyism. Sycophancy is a two-way transaction and the burden of guilt must be shared as much by the junior who butters up a senior, as by the senior who encourages or even permits such blandishments. Once again, our natural tendency to accord reverence to those in positions of authority makes it easy to blur the line between courtesy and good manners on one hand, and obsequiousness on the other.

Sycophancy is an insidious syndrome and if not ruthlessly purged by those in senior positions, inevitably leads to the formation of cliques and coteries. Coteries, in turn, create an unending cycle of sycophancy and patronage, which breeds a set of courtiers who always bring good news and never contradict the boss. A senior officer who surrounds himself with such people isolates himself dangerously and will certainly

take wrong decisions, which may cause resentment and harm the Service.

#### OVERWEENING AMBITION

Ambition is a highly desirable trait in a human being, and especially in a fighting man. Without it, there would be no aspiration for higher accomplishment and no quest for perfection. Fighting men must, however, guard against something called 'overweening ambition'.

Ambition becomes 'overweening' when a person starts placing personal interests and advancement above loyalty to comrades and the Service. To individuals consumed by overweening ambition, nothing remains sacred. They will not hesitate to stab colleagues in the back, or stoop to unethical actions, and will, at some point of time, mobilize all means, including the media, bureaucracy and politicians, for furthering their personal agenda. No set of ethics or morality can stand before such ambition.

Approaching a court of law is, of course, an individual's basic right but by doing so, he makes a clear declaration that he has decided to place his personal ambition above the interests of the Service. No court case can be fought without sullyng the image of the Service and casting aspersions on superiors, peers and even subordinates. An individual must agonize long and hard before he/she adopts the litigious route. Often, a resignation may be a far more honourable option because not only will the individual be setting a fine example of courage and fortitude to juniors, but he will also be remembered with respect.

In order to ensure that ambition does not become overweening, one must remember that the Service is bigger and more precious than all of us, and protecting its good name must receive priority over personal ambition. Ambitious individuals must also rid themselves of the delusion that destiny has marked them for a certain position which requires them to embark on a holy crusade to grab it; there is no such thing as a born Nelson or Napoleon.

Subordinating personal aspirations to a greater good does not come naturally to every individual, especially if he is nursing a grudge or grievance. The oft-heard cynical aphorism, 'Show me a face and I'll show you the rule', lies at the root of much discontent in the Services. A caveat to everything I have just said is that personnel managers in the Services must scrupulously ensure a level playing field for everyone.

### **LEADING BY PERSONAL EXAMPLE**

The human gene, it is said, is programmed to be selfish and even deceitful, to ensure replication and survival of the species. Therefore, if we are to produce good human beings, who are morally upright and ethical, it requires thorough conditioning and indoctrination. In such a process, the presence of an iconic figure acts as a catalyst, and a senior officer, by providing his personal example for emulation, becomes a crucial facilitator.

A good personal example, thus, becomes a mutually binding contract between the leader and the led. When the leader says, 'follow my actions and do exactly as you see me doing', he is binding himself to a strict code of conduct. At the same time, he gives the others no choice, but to follow the example he is setting.

It could be said that leading by personal example is easy. Whether it is minor issues like physical fitness, personal appearance and punctuality, or the more serious ethical attributes like honesty, integrity and transparency, all the leader has to do is conduct himself the way he would like subordinates to behave. And yet, it is also very difficult because one slip on his part can deprive him of the moral right to lead. Such is the prevailing transparency that nothing can remain hidden for long, and double standards never work.

As officers grow in their respective Services, they are granted many privileges, most of which have a sound logic or tradition behind them. Essentially, they are meant to relieve a senior officer of the burden of trivial issues so that he can devote his full attention and energies to pursuit of professional responsibilities. Such privileges include furnished accommodation, domestic staff, telephones, transports and much more. Expenditure can also be incurred on the maintenance and furnishing of designated residences and on hosting of official entertainment.

This is one area where many senior officers often show extremely poor judgement by blurring the line between personal and official requirements and by misusing privileges and funds that come with rank or appointment. The urge to 'keep up with the Joneses' in other sections of our upwardly mobile society has led some in the senior hierarchy of the armed forces to adopt inappropriate and ostentatious customs and lifestyles; largely, by misusing the perks and privileges accorded to them. When a commander suppresses his own scruples to indulge in a

misdemeanour, he forfeits the moral authority to reprimand or punish others for similar wrongdoing, and actually sends out a subtle signal that bending or breaking rules is acceptable.

A prudent senior officer will draw a clear distinction between his official and personal requirements, especially where intrusions by his family into the official domain are concerned. Having done that, he must articulate the 'red lines' for the benefit of his staff and subordinates. In this context, there is no such thing as a 'minor violation' and each temptation must be treated as a test of one's integrity.

#### APPRAISAL AND COUNSELLING SYSTEMS

A final aspect that has an indirect but crucial bearing on the moral health of the armed forces is the personnel appraisal system followed by them. When one comes across officers of high rank who clearly demonstrate an absence of moral fibre, and who let down the armed forces in public, the question asked most often is: 'how did the system allow someone like him to reach such an exalted rank?' The general opinion that emerges is that either the system is badly flawed or that it is open to influence and interference.

These conclusions may be partly true, but a major portion of the blame for inappropriate promotions lies on every individual who ever had the onerous responsibility of rendering CRs on subordinates. It is the duty of every reporting officer to get to know the appraisee, to observe him closely and to periodically counsel him in person about his strengths and weaknesses. This duty is not to be seen as a formality because it is the key to the appraisal system.

The crux of the problem is that if an adverse comment is entered in the CR, it requires the report to be signed by the appraisee. It is here that most reporting officers show a marked lack of spine by not confronting the officer with his drawbacks. They end up writing a bland and meaningless report which fails to reflect the officer's shortcomings. When such officers come up for consideration by promotion or selection boards, there is nothing in the colourless reports to indicate their flaws and they often get promoted.

In most cases where an unsuitable person receives promotion, it is neither 'political pressure' nor the influence of an 'uncle' which has helped the man, but a failure of the appraisal system to accurately reflect the individual's flaws and shortcomings. This, in turn, could be due to lack

of moral courage on the part of reporting officers and their inability to be brutally honest with subordinates. It is, therefore, vital that a major review be undertaken of the reporting and promotion systems of the three Services so as to eliminate the flaws that have crept into it, thereby restoring credibility to the process.

### CONCLUSION

The monster of corruption, so far seen in all walks of civil life and institutions in India, has reared its ugly head in the armed forces too. While other organizations may compromise on principles and limp along regardless, the esprit de corps, professionalism and cohesion of the Indian armed forces are bound to suffer if this canker is not exorcized from their system.

Erosion in combat effectiveness of the armed forces will, no doubt, have an adverse impact on India's national security. However, there will also be second-order effects on civil society which need to be considered. With a million-and-a-half men under arms and three million veterans scattered all over the country, the armed forces make a vital contribution to the country's social fabric. They not only remain, in the midst of prevailing chaos, an embodiment of discipline, professionalism and excellence, but have also firmly upheld India's secular and democratic traditions. Restoring the respect and self-esteem of the armed forces is, therefore, vitally important.

Regrettably, it is clear that neither the Ministry of Defence nor any other civilian authority in the country either cares about the moral health of the military or can do anything about it. In fact, one can sense a degree of *schadenfreude* at recent incidents involving senior servicemen in many quarters, especially in the media. The onus for stemming the rot and attempting to reclaim the *izzat* of the armed forces, therefore, lies squarely on the current military leadership—both in Delhi and in Command HQs all over—with basic training institutions becoming the foci of close attention.

While a part of the answer lies in invoking the existing rules and regulations to deal with wrongdoers on a legal basis, a major thrust must be made to revive a sense of honour and pride in the profession of arms, and by introducing self-monitoring and self-regulatory systems within the Services. This endeavour can only be initiated by the top military leadership of the three Services acting in concert to: first, focus on the

moral health of the Services; second, to create formal codes of conduct; and finally, to set personal examples of a spartan, upright and soldierly way of life.