

PATHBREAKING STUDY: INSIDE

The first-ever Tehelka Indian Army Survey was designed and analysed by **Yogendra Yadav** and **Sanjay Kumar** and its fieldwork conducted by **Sky Rise Consultants**. The survey takes a hard look at various issues including Kashmir, nuclear war, attitudes to Pakistan and views on political leaders

The first-ever public survey on the morale of the Indian army is a revelation in most parts. A cross-section of officers, junior commissioned officers (JCOs) and jawans highlight what they think is right internally, just as the responses focus sharp attention on what are clear warning signals.

For those interested in the army as a professional institution, the good news is that the army men have a high degree of job satisfaction. Two-thirds of those interviewed reported a 'very high' level of satisfaction. Almost everyone agreed that the society gives them due respect. The deep dissatisfaction and frustration that one associates with public sector workers is not evident here, at least not on the surface. More than three-fourths would like their kids to join the army, thus belying the oft-expressed fear that there is a widespread disenchantment among the armed forces. An overwhelming majority would like their daughters to marry another armyman. This overall positive feeling is shared by jawans, JCOs and officers, young and old. The only voice of dissent comes from the wives of the army officers: a majority of them are not keen on sending their sons to the army or marrying their daughters to army men.

For the aggressive nationalists, there is good news about the army's morale in a war situation. The soldiers have a high degree of trust in the capacities of their seniors. Almost every single soldier spoken to in this survey exuded confidence that the Indian army will defeat Pakistan in the event of a war. This may be an article of faith for the men in uniform. For, another comparison with the Pakistani army drew an equally strong and rather naive response: everyone agreed that the Indian army men were looked after better than their Pakistani counterparts. There is no doubt some anxiety about the possibility of a nuclear war and the level of preparedness, such as there can be, to face it. The officers know more about it and have better reasons to feel a little nervous on this score. As would be expected, the soldiers come up with strong nationalist reactions on Kashmir. All of them believe Kashmir is an integral part of India that cannot be 'given' to Pakistan. They see militancy in Kashmir as terrorism, and not a struggle for freedom. At the same time they do recognise that the Kashmir problem is a political problem, and not a religious one. The confidence that the army can 'solve' the Kashmir problem is tempered by a realisation, more among the officers than among the ranks, that Indo-Pak war may not be the solution.

For those anxious to find out about the army's compatibility with a democratic set-up, the signs are positive. No doubt the soldiers have a low level of confidence in political leaders and parties, but they are no different in this respect from ordinary Indian citizens. Like others, the soldiers too have a higher degree of trust in political institutions such as the government and the election commission. What matters here is that given a choice between democratic and army rule, two-thirds of the army men were firmly in favour of democracy. While jawans and JCOs display some weakness for an army rule, the officers are unanimous in their rejection of the non-democratic option.

All in all then, the army as an institution seems to have succeeded in inculcating the ideology of nationalism, democracy and secularism—a difficult achievement at the best of times. Many other countries have found it difficult to combine all these elements among their armed forces and paid the price for that. The enterprise of nation building in our own country has not quite succeeded in spreading all these values among the vast body of citizens. In this context, the achievement of the army as a secular institution of a modern nation-state is remarkable.

Although the fundamentals are robust, the survey indicates that all is not well with the Indian army. Hidden behind small percentages in the tables—small percentages is what one would expect in a survey like this—are signs of unease, anxiety and even

frustration that demand attention from the country. Some of these relate to routine questions of working conditions and pay packages. But a significant part of the unease has to do with the use of armed forces for things other than what they are meant to do. There is some anxiety about the possibility and level of preparedness for nuclear war. And of course there is a pent-up unease about the corruption in defence affairs and within the army.

If jawans and JCOs are dissatisfied with their salary, some officers are unhappy about the lack of leisure time. In the absence of any comparative figures, it is difficult to say if the level of dissatisfaction among the soldiers is higher than that of any other sector of public service. But the clear gap between the ranks and the officers on this score requires attention. There is a subdued anxiety about post-retirement situation and the future of the family if they suffer loss of life or limbs in action. While all of them worry about their families, the jawans and JCOs who have served for more than five years confess to sexual frustration as well. Incidentally, this is the group that records the lowest level of satisfaction and the highest level of anxiety in relative terms for most of the indicators in this survey. The army would do well to attend to the legitimate grievances of this group. Most of the army men surveyed here said there was pressure of work; the new entrants among the ranks and officers felt it more than their seniors. Another source of concern is the feeling that there is a caste and religion-based discrimination within the army. The proportion of those who agree with this suggestion is fairly large. The only consolation here is that perceptions on this are not divided along caste and communal lines.

Besides these, there are specific anxieties in our country that have to do with the manner in which armed forces have been used. A significant number of the



Army chief Gen NC Vij: need for introspection



A significant number of soldiers surveyed agreed that the morale of the armed forces has gone down due to political interference