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## **Making Best Use of the Human Capital of Ex Servicemen in India**

**Mr.Sanjay Singh, Research Scholar**

**Department of Management**

**E-mail:sanjaysingh.ssingh@gmail.com**

**The Current Situation:** India has a very large defence force comprising largely of the army of more than one million people, with a smaller number of people in the Air Force and the Navy. The national policies require that people from the defence forces retire early in order to ensure a young combatant force given the security imperatives of multiple threats that India faces.

Soldiers in the defence forces may be eligible for the pension as early as with just 15 years of service. Hence, if they begin their service at 18 years, they may have retired as early as 33 years of age. Given that the life expectancy in India is about 70 years it would mean that such people would have 37 years of life left even at the time of release from the army. There are about 60,000 soldiers being released back into society from the Indian Defence Forces each year.

A new situation is evolving in the country today recruits have been taken for just four years service initially as 'Agniveers'. Such recruits would then join the army, navy or Air Force for just four years initially. After this, only 25% would be retained in the defence forces and the balance 75% would be released. This would make available an even larger base of human capital to Indian society.

India has a large community of ex-servicemen, especially personnel below officer rank (PBOR) and their families, who are settled in the interiors and remote areas of the country. These ex-servicemen have served the nation with dedication and valour, and have acquired valuable skills and experience during their tenure in the defence forces. However, after their retirement, they often face challenges in finding suitable employment opportunities, adjusting to civilian life, and accessing welfare schemes and benefits.

Soldiers released from the defence forces bring with them certain clear strengths. Having been a part of the army, they have, imbibed in them a strong sense of patriotism and national fervour. Also, the army has a practice of carrying out intensive training for its troops. People being

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released have thus undergone a great deal of training and education. There is much scope to map the training and skills taught and learned in the army, perhaps on a basis of providing an equivalence in credit points , to qualifications which are required for effective employment in civil society after completion of their military service. Such a mapping would go a long way to ensure that the investment made by the defence forces in the soldier are Correctly mapped to qualifications relevant in civil society in general and then correctly utilised in society while ensuring also that the soldier is given his due for his contributions while in Defence Force Service and in civil society later. This would create a win win situation both for the soldier and for the nation.

The Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (DESW) under the Ministry of Defence is the nodal agency for matters relating to armed forces veterans, including pensioners. It looks after the welfare, resettlement and rehabilitation of ex-servicemen, war widows and their dependents. It also administers various pension regulations and schemes for ex-servicemen. Besides this the Defence Forces headquarters themselves also have organisations created for the purpose of facilitating jobs for ex servicemen. These include organisations like the Army Welfare Placement organisation or AWPO. There are also some shining examples of initiatives taken by state governments to provide rehabilitation to soldiers, sailors and airmen as in the case of Uttar Pradesh, through its Initiatives like the Uttar Pradesh SainikKalyan Nigam Limited and Uttar Pradesh SainikPunarvasNidhi.

With more than two million ex-servicemen who have served in the defence forces and then been retired or released into civil society; dispersed over the entire length and breadth of the country , there is a requirement to explore further avenues and initiatives that can help ex-servicemen leverage their potential and contribute to the society and economy in a meaningful way. Harnessing this human capital would help individual retired soldiers as well as the nation as a whole.

**What Can be Done:** Some of the possible measures that can be taken towards better preparing ex servicemen for gainfully contributing to the nation after their defence for service could include:



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- **Improving the scope of programmes for skill development and retraining:** To assist former military members in acquiring new skills or upgrading their current ones for jobs in the civilian sector, the defence services offer a variety of skill development and retraining initiatives. *Collaboration with business partners, educational institutions, career training centres, and other stakeholders can help these programmes* become even better. Additionally, the programmes can be altered to meet the objectives and goals of ex-military members while taking into account factors like age, rank, service branch, location, etc.
  - **Strengthening direct communication between the Ministry of Defence and services on the one hand and ex servicemen on the other.** Communication would be essential in order that whatever benefits are planned for ex servicemen can be communicated to him and his dependents on time .Once a soldier has retired he or his dependents have no systemized direct contact with the Defence Forces . The only one means that was earlier available was when a pensioner contacted his pension disbursing office during the annual verification that the pensioner was alive. With progress in information technology and communications , that process has largely got automated. Even before this automated process of JeevanPraman was implemented there was really no systemized procedure for contacting the retired people to communicate whatever benefits were due to them directly. The issue becomes more relevant considering that in the older pensioners and their dependents levels of literacy are often low . Communication will always be an important part of execution of any schemes that are planned. There is hence a *requirement of creating a means within the software applications for JeevanPraman to provide a link for the retired pensioner to access whatever schemes have been formulated for his benefit.*
  - **Improving work prospects:** The Directorate General of Resettlement (DGR), a division of the DESW, offers ex-servicemen a number of self-employment and placement help programmes. By *increasing the number of companies, developing online tools for job matching, offering career counselling and advice, assuring fair pay and working conditions, etc.*, these programmes can be further improved. To increase job prospects for veterans in industries like security, education, health care, agriculture, etc., the DGR can
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also *collaborate with other government agencies, public sector organisations, private sector businesses, non-governmental organisations, etc.*

- **Promoting entrepreneurship and innovation:** Due to their leadership abilities, discipline, resilience, problem-solving skills, etc., former service members have a great deal of potential to succeed as entrepreneurs and inventors. By *offering financial aid, tax breaks, mentorship, incubator facilities, market connections*, and other resources, the government can promote and help former service members who want to launch their own enterprises or initiatives. The government might also set up a *platform where ex-servicemen can display their creative concepts and goods and connect with potential clients, mentors, and investors.*
- **Strengthening welfare programmes and benefits:** The DESW also offers a number of welfare programmes and benefits for veterans, including financial aid through the KendriyaSainik Board (KSB), access to medical care through the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), and educational scholarships through the Prime Minister's Scholarship Programme (PMSS). *Enhancing the scope of the welfare programmes and benefits and communicating this to the potential beneficiaries* can help to boost these programmes and benefits even more.
- **Simplifying the eligibility requirements and application process:** The DESW also offers a number of welfare programmes and benefits for ex-servicemen, including health care through the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), educational scholarships through the Prime Minister's Scholarship Scheme (PMSS), and financial aid through the KendriyaSainik Board (KSB). By *streamlining the eligibility conditions, lowering the documentation needs, developing online application and verification portals, assuring prompt payment disbursement*, etc., these programmes and benefits can be made even more straightforward. In order to enlighten ex-servicemen about the many programmes and benefits that are available to them and how to access them, the DESW can also develop *awareness-raising and outreach initiatives.*
- **Honouring and awarding veterans:** Veterans could be honoured for their service to the country and their sacrifices. When it comes to special days like Armed Forces Flag Day, Republic Day, Independence Day, etc., the government can honour veterans by



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presenting them with prizes, medals, certificates, etc, where deserved. The government may also offer ex-servicemen incentives and benefits, such as reduced rail and plane fares, canteen and phone services, preferential stream selection for IIT entry, admission to MBBS/BDS colleges, etc. By *planning events, campaigns, exhibitions, and other activities that highlight ex-servicemen's accomplishments and contributions*, the government can help encourage a culture of respect and gratitude among the general population. Also, by granting recognition for their military service, corporations and private employers will also be encouraged to employ veterans.

- **Ensuring the social and emotional wellbeing of veterans:** Veterans may have a variety of social and emotional difficulties after leaving the military, including loneliness, sadness, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), etc. The government can promote the social and emotional health of former military members by offering *counselling and psychological support services, setting up peer support networks, planning leisure and cultural events, fostering family links and community integration*, and other activities. Through programmes like the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund (AFFDF), the government can also assist in the rehabilitation of former military members who have been injured or crippled by giving mobility aids, prosthetic limbs, artificial organs, etc.
  - **Employment in security forces central armed police forces other police forces and in other government jobs.** Considering the very large number of people who are retiring each year totalling more than 60,000 annually there stands to occur great gains in human capital if the potential of the young retirees from the defence forces can be harnessed by employing them in other security forces including central armed police forces and state police besides armed police and so on. There are already several measures afoot. However almost none of them give credit for their service in the army in terms of giving them suitable seniority in other government services. There is a requirement of a policy change in this regard in order to ensure that ex servicemen are optimally used in roles which they have been prepared for in the defence forces.
  - **Creating online portal mapping skills and education gained in the defence forces prior to release of individual on retirement.** There is a requirement of creating an online portal automatically matching the skills and education of a soldier, sailor or
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airman to requirements on the civil side. It would be ideal if artificial intelligence could be used for preparing a crude or rough Curriculum Vitae (CV) of an individual based upon his qualifications in the army and then hosting it online. The individual could be given access to his own CV to update and refine it as he deems correct. This CV can then be Posted on the Internet by either the service placement organisation or by the DESW or one of its organs. Recruiters would then be able to identify the talent suited to their requirements. There may also be a scope for charging some money from the recruiters in order to keep the automated system going. This would create a fail -safe sustainable system in place and create a win-win situation for the ex servicemen as well as for the organisation or industry seeking suitable recruits.

**Conclusion:** India has an extraordinary large number of Ex servicemen numbering more than 2 million. These soldiers, sailors and airmen having given their best years of their life to the security of the nation have also obtained valuable experience, skills and education in the process. In enabling them so the nation has invested a fair amount of effort and money. It would be best if their experience commerce skills and education is used optimally after their release from the defence forces in the interests of society and business; so as to permit the country to gain economically from their experience as also to allow for optimal redeployment of such retiring persons into gainful employment. The series of measures outlined above have the potential to help in this regard.