

An Analysis Of Military Culture In Indian Media-Military Relationship

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ABSTRACT: Understanding of the military culture came as a crucial and to some extent, a bewildering bone of contention in the Indian media and military relationship. The paper attempts to throw light on this complex understanding between the two different institutions, with different objectives, motivations, and structures, and who have to cross each other paths due to the professional and institutional demands at the micro level and for the nation building at macro level. The paper is based on qualitative research and presents a slice of that reality, (not reality as a whole).

KEY WORDS: Media, News Media, Media Military Relationship, Military Culture

Introduction: The media-military relationship is a complex term, which requires an open-minded and in-depth understanding. It is a baffling relationship at times. Where the relationship bears the merit of presenting armed forces valour, sacrifice and needs in the public light, acting as a force multiplier and an instrument of crafting a narrative, which can enhance the strategic objective of the military. Often the relationship is clouded with misconceptions, pre-conceived notions, selective perceptions and shadows of mistrust, which is further aggravated with the lack of knowledge. One of the issues, which were identified by the researcher during the research study, was the 'lack of understanding of the military culture' by the Indian news media.

Understanding of the military culture came as a crucial and to some extent, a bewildering bone of contention in the Indian media and military relationship. The paper attempts to throw light on this complex understanding between the two different institutions, with different objectives, motivations, and structures, and who have to cross each other paths due to the professional and institutional demands at the micro level and for the nation building at macro level. The paper is based on qualitative research and presents a slice of that reality, (not reality as a whole).

Objective: The objective of the research paper is to highlight the complexities of Indian news media's understanding of the Indian Military Culture and its implication of Indian Media-Military Relationship. The research paper attempts to comprehend the level of understanding of the Indian military culture by the Indian news media. Also, the paper seeks an answer to the question if the Indian military perceptions towards the Indian news media's understanding of the military culture is in tandem with latter or not?

Research Methodology: The research paper is a part of a larger research study, which was qualitative in nature and was based on the grounded theory method as advocated by Corbin and Strauss. The theory allows for identification of general concept, the development of theoretical explanation that reaches beyond the known and offers new insight into the variety of experience and phenomena.¹ (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) As suggested by Sarah J. Tracy, the research study took "phronetic" approach to conduct the research. This approach suggests that qualitative data can be systematically gathered, organized, interpreted, analyzed, and communicated so as to address real world concerns.² (Tracy 2013)

Data Collection: The research paper is based on primary and secondary data collection. For primary data the research undertook in-depth interviews. The sample design for interview was done under non-random sampling technique, under which purposive sampling was used. For in-depth interviews semi-structured questionnaire along with probing questions was used. The participant profile included veterans from Indian armed forces, civilian officer acting as a bridge between Ministry of Defence and Media, and journalists from defence journalism.³ Besides, observation method, memo writing and field notes were also used. For secondary sources government document, audio- video recordings, journals, newspapers, historical documents, books, autobiographies, biographies and so on were used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation: The data analysis and interpretation was done following the grounded theory method as advocated by Corbin and Strauss. Necessary steps of theoretical sampling⁴, constant comparative method⁵ were employed till theoretical saturation was achieved.⁶ The research study undertook the assistance of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, CAQDAS.

Limitation of the paper: As the research paper is qualitative in nature, therefore, its result cannot be generalised. Qualitative research is a form of research in which the researcher collects and interprets data, making the researchers as much a part of the research process as the participant and the data they provide.⁷ (Corbin & Staruss 2015) As the sample was taken through non-random sampling, the sample is purely on the purpose set by the researcher and cannot be quantified like that of random sampling. In order to check the researcher's own influence on the research, the concept of 'reflexivity' was adopted by the researcher. The 'idea of reflexivity' as outlined by McGhee (et al., 2007) defines 'reflexivity' as "an awareness of the ways in

which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process."⁸

Literature review: Understanding of Military culture came as a crucial and to some extent a bewildering bone of contention between Indian media and military relationship. At this point the word military culture requires an analysis. This section will make an attempt to understand the epistemology behind the word military culture, in brief. As per the search in the Oxford dictionary, the word military and culture come separately. Oxford dictionary defines military as 'The armed forces of a country'⁹ and culture is defined as 'The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.'¹⁰ By combining the definition of two terms, military and culture, it consolidates into the "Ideas, customs and social social behaviour of armed forces of a country". Military culture is a distinct kind of institutional culture and observing the functioning of the military from the prism of its culture provides a better understanding of the 'nature of their interaction with state and society.'¹¹ (Wilson, 2008).

This brings us to the fundamental question that what is the composition of the 'armed forces of a country' based on which this culture is evolved and acquired. Although military appears to be monolithic in nature with the second largest military in the world in terms of the manpower.¹² (Kelkar, 2019) It is to be noted while elaborating on the Indian Army recruitment based on including certain ethnicities and castes, with 'martial' element, a tradition followed since pre-independence following the colonial recruitment system, the central government of India stated, "Certain regiments of the Army were organised on lines of classification because social, cultural and linguistic homogeneity has been observed to be a force multiplier as a battle-winning factor...The commonality of language and culture only further augments the smooth

execution of the operation."¹³ (Guruswamy, M. 2016) This statement reinforces that the human resource inducted in the armed forces belong to different ethnic, caste and culture group, which later joins together to form a more prominent culture, that we call military culture. But while viewing the Indian armed forces from the lens of culture, it is a diverse mix of different identities, culture, region, religion and an exemplary example of "unity in diversity" defending the country. As mentioned in the Chapter 'India', in the book 'Religion in the Military Worldwide', "The multifaith Indian army defends a constitutionally secular state, yet it remains a force of believers." Furthermore, the Indian army undertakes extraordinary measures to include the cultural as well religious needs of the soldiers and employs religion as one of the instruments to keep the motivation of the ranks high. (Ahuja, 2013)¹⁴ The diversity of the Indian armed forces are bonded together with the 'ethos of the Army is ingrained in all soldiers.'¹⁵ This ethos, which are based on the following values:¹⁶

- **Espirit-de-Corps** The spirit of comradeship and brotherhood of the brave, regardless of caste, creed or religion. The motto is, "One for all and all for one"!
- **Spirit of Selfless Sacrifice** The tradition is never to question, but to do or die for the three "Ns"; **Naam**, i.e. name-honour- of the unit/Army/Nation, **'Namak'(salt)** i.e. loyalty to the Nation, and **'Nishan'**, i.e. the insignia or flag of his unit/regiment/Army/Nation which the soldiers hold afloat willingly.
- **Valour** Fearlessness in combat and in the face of the enemy even when fighting against great odds or even when facing sure death.
- **Non-discrimination** The Indian Army does not discriminate on

account of caste, creed or religion. A soldier is a soldier first and anything else later. He prays under a common roof. It is this unique character, which makes him bind in a team despite such diversity.

- **Fairness and Honesty** The spirit of honesty and fair play. He fights for a just cause that extends even to the enemy (prisoner or wounded).
- **Discipline and Integrity** Discipline and integrity impart the feeling of patriotism, honesty and courage under all circumstances, however strong be the provocation otherwise.
- **Fidelity, Honour and Courage** He is a man on whose shoulders lies the honour and integrity of his nation. He knows that he is the last line of defence and he cannot fail the Nation.
- **Death to Dishonour** A close bond amongst soldiers forces them to choose death to dishonour. The concept of 'IZZAT' (HONOUR) in the clan / unit enables them to shun the fear of death; to be called a coward in the peer group is worse than death.
- **Forthrightness** A soldier has to be forthright, for on his word the men he leads are going to lay down their lives without questioning why.

Findings: An Analysis of Military Culture in Indian Media Military Relationship: A Complex Affair

It was observed in the research study that one of the grievances from military against the media and as a challenge for media was media's lack of understanding of military culture. Though the military culture was not

part of the initial enquiry. However, while collecting the primary data it emerged as part of theoretical sampling and was subsequently incorporated as one of the probing questions asked to the respondents. It is interesting to see the diverse responses, arguments, and observations, which emerged during the course of the research study. With a view to bringing clarity to this important concept, the military culture is extensively discussed in the intensive literature review and also in this section of the paper.

In this section, the paper endeavors to bring out diverse views related to military culture and its impact on Indian media-military relationship. It presents all the views shared by the respondents, observation of the researcher, and supports it with secondary data. The secondary data was collected from research papers, articles, newspapers and other significant sources of information, which provided an overview of the respondent's diverse viewpoints.

Military culture is a distinct kind of institutional culture. Observing the functioning of the military from the prism of its culture provides a better understanding of the 'nature of their interaction with state and society' (Wilson, 2008). Following are different views, which emerged during the primary data collection:

- **Media is unable to understand the military culture:** It was observed during the study there was a repetitive grievance expressed by the respondents with defence background that the media did not understand the military culture. While responding to the question there was 'deficiency of knowledge on both the sides' Indian Army veteran respondent 4D noted, "The first and foremost is that media indeed the world outside

sometimes don't understand that the Army's driven by a very strong culture. That culture makes the Army an Island in itself. Army officers and men behave in a different way because the tug of that culture drives them. Unless you understand that culture you would never get it and I think the media makes less than a dozen an effort to understand that their culture part (sic)."

- **Understanding military culture is challenging for a journalist:** Regarding the understanding of military culture by defence journalists, one of the challenges from the media side, was that even for the journalists (especially those coming from the civilian background) understanding the military culture was a challenging task. As pointed out by defence journalist respondent 7G, "Yeah it is, it is. It's still a very strange animal. If you see the way, the military function exists. They always behind high walls. They're always out of sight, out of mind unless they want to be in your sides are always out of sight. So it's not the easiest of things to understand what the military is like and why it is the way it is. They very shy very often, they only come out, and they only talk to you when they genuinely trust you [sic]." From the above statement that 'They always behind high walls' is reminiscent of military veteran comments 4D, 'That culture makes the Army an Island in itself [sic].' It is to be noted that to some extent military 'island' nature is one of the factors behind the lack of understanding of military culture in the media.

- **Defence correspondents do understand military culture:** In a counter view to the military respondents' view of lack of understanding of military culture in media, the research study observed the counter view coming from defence correspondents. One of the counter views was that the defence correspondents understood the military culture. As pointed out by defence journalist respondent 7G, "I would like to think that I have understood (military culture) some of it. I never say I have understood everything because it still is work in progress. But yes [sic]." While responding to the question if the Indian defence correspondents understood the military culture and its implication on news reporting; defence journalist respondent 7G noted, "They do, they do, but that also happens with time. So organisations as in media organisations and journalists who put in the effort of studying and observing something very seriously they do. They do understand with time [sic]." On similar lines, defence journalist respondent 8H pointed out, "Yes, people understand (the military culture...) [sic]." In a counter-response to this, veteran defence journalist respondent 9I noted, "It's a mixed bag. Not everybody has an understanding, but I must say this they're very sincere those who report on the military very sincere. They were if they're interested, passionate. They are willing to learn, but there is one problem that they may not get the same opportunities as us in the 80s and the 90s those who reported from the ground because the numbers have just ballooned... [sic]."
- **Defence correspondents with military background understand military culture better:** It was observed during the study that there was an assumption that defence correspondents from military background had an advantage over those from non-military background, as the former understood the military culture and nuances of military better. Regarding respondent's own understanding of military culture, veteran defence journalist respondent 9I noted, "Yes, I do. I will I do because one I come from a military family. My father was in the Army. So we've had in our childhood a lot of exposure to the military way of life in the 60s and the 70s in growing up but that is not enough. I've been lucky that I've only dealt with militants in the military in the first 23 years of my career in the Northeast...But if you ask anybody about my understanding of the military culture, ethos, tradition and deep insights, I can safely and without boasting say that I have one of the better understandings amongst many other journalists about the Indian military or the South Asian countries [sic]."
- **Non-military background defence correspondents also understands the military culture:** There was a counter piece of evidence, where it was proved within the limited scope of research that despite not having a military background, defence respondents understood the

military culture. One of the major reasons for understanding of the military culture was the respondent's continuous interaction with the army while reporting from conflict zones. In response to the question if the respondent was from military background and understood military culture; veteran defence journalist, respondent 11K replied, "No, I'm not but you understand a little bit of it. As a journalist, whatever exposure you get in Kashmir, we got quite exposed to military culture. So I do understand. Yeah, if you are in a conflict zone where you have to interact with the army a lot, you will understand [sic]." Moreover, the views reinforce the hypothesis that continuous interaction with the defence journalist by the military helps the journalist in understanding the military culture better. But, when the military confines itself behind a wall or exist as an island, it, creates a hindrance for those who want to know army and defence journalists are not an exception.

- **Lack of investment in understanding the military culture impacts the quality of reporting:** While deliberating about the implications of lack of investment in understanding the military culture by media organisations and defence journalists, defence journalist respondent 7G noted, "But organisations and journalists who do not dedicate so much of their time and effort and understanding to it, it is so very easily that they're not really being able to do a very good job of covering or reporting on some issues [sic]." This lack of

understanding can affect the quality of media reporting, which subsequently can have an undesired impact on the men/women in uniform.

- **Military culture isn't a single culture but amalgamation of sub-cultures:** Another interesting point, which emerged in the research study, was the description of military culture from the perspective of sub-cultures. While defence respondents' responses indicated 'military culture' as a single entity; the military culture was actually an amalgamation of sub-cultures. As pointed out by veteran defence journalist 10J, "If there is anyone such thing as military culture. Do I understand it? That's a complicated question. I certainly don't understand it as an insider. I have enough friends and colleagues in 20 years of covering this, who were part of that culture. I would say that, there, in fact, I go further and say there isn't any such thing as A Indian military culture. There are several subcultures within this which are quite often at odds to each other the world of Captain Saab about Major Saab will be very different from the world of the three-star General and not necessarily harmonious. I have some glimpses in it [sic]." Furthermore, while describing the military culture, veteran defence journalist 10J, noted, "The world ...of the public relations professional is very different from the world of the engineer or the IT person or the politician. And similarly, there are many military

cultures. There are within that the worlds of intelligence, the world of the paramilitary forces, the world of the Armed Forces themselves, the tensions between regular military units in those of counterinsurgency duties [sic].”

- **Chances of getting swayed away by military culture:** It was observed during the research study that one of the challenges faced by the defence journalists was the ‘chances of getting swayed away by military culture’. Stated by a defence correspondent that an outsider, who initially interacted with the military, can get swayed away by its colossal, magnanimous and luminary culture. While elaborating on the experiences by the defence journalist respondent 7G, noted, “...I have been privileged and fortunate to even see the other side of it where this relationship is really ...helps... matters a lot, but it's just yet another instance where it's not very easy to understand the military. You can get carried away very easily and that's why I say it's a little bit (little bit) of a challenge to understand military culture and why the military is behaving the way it is [sic].” Presenting a counterview to getting swayed away, Indian armed forces veteran respondent 4D, noted, “You see what a tough times in the Army has to not to do anything else other than what they do every day. Journalists can get swayed in two months. We live that life. You can call it being swayed. You can call it developing an empathy you can call it developing an understanding of what it is the complexity of the life is...but I

would say if the choice is between not understanding and risk of getting swayed. I would vote for getting swayed and understanding more. If eight guys understand and two get swayed. I'll take it any day [sic].”

Conclusion:

The understanding of the military culture by the Indian news media and the military's own comprehension of India news media understanding emerged as a complex and at time bewildering concept. It was observed where on one hand, the respondents of the Indian military were of the opinion that the Indian news media doesn't understand the military culture and produce news reports, which affect the cultural component of the Indian military. On the other hand, the defence journalists representing the Indian media in this study expressed their understanding about the military culture to an extent which they either acquired during the course of interaction with the Indian military or by being from the military background. However, two important views which need mention is that firstly it is essential for the media person to develop his/her understanding about the military culture to understand the organisation, but not to get influenced by it as it may affect the objectivity in the reporting, so the media person have to tread with caution. Secondly, the military in order to make the media persons aware of the military culture, have to increase interaction with the media persons to make them understand the culture in which the military operates. However, they have to bear in mind that understanding the culture should not only be seen from the lens of perception management, psychological warfare, information warfare and reputation management. The difference between the objectives of both institutions is the core reason for the survival of this relationship. Nevertheless, the difference should not be seen as a reason for conflict, but an

opportunity to engage each other's strengths for the nation's good.

¹ Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. (A. Strauss & J. Corbin, Eds.) (4th ed., Vol. 2nd, p. 52). Thousand Oaks, California, US: Sage Publications.

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² Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. Wiley-Blackwell (Vol. 1, p. 4). <https://doi.org/10.5613/rzs.43.1.6>

³ The author is grateful to the respondents from the Indian armed forces and defence journalism for their vital inputs. The respondents are given code in order to maintain their anonymity.

⁴ . The purpose of theoretical sampling is to collect data from places, people and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of theory properties and dimension, uncover variations and identify the relationship between the concepts.⁴ (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)

⁵ At the stage of coding process, a constant comparative method was adopted by the research study in which the latest generated data was compared with the existing data or previously generated data or previous research studies.

⁶ This paper is a part of the research dissertation so only limited findings have been share.

⁷ Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. (A. Strauss & J. Corbin, Eds.) (4th ed., Vol. 2nd, p. 4). Thousand Oaks, California, US: Sage Publications.

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⁸ McGhee, G., Marland, G. R., & Atkinson, J. (2007, November). Grounded theory research: Literature reviewing and reflexivity. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.

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¹² Kelkar, A. (2019, February 15). What the defence budget 2019 says about the Indian Army. Retrieved June 9, 2019, from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/what-the-defence-budget-2019-says-about-the-indian-army-48210/>

¹³ Guruswamy, M. (2016, July 11). Why the Indian army needs to abandon the colonial concept of 'martial races'. Retrieved June 20, 2019, from <https://scroll.in/article/811303/why-the-indian-army-needs-to-abandon-the-colonial-concept-of-martial-races>

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¹⁵ Our Ethos. (n.d.). Retrieved June 9, 2019, from

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¹⁶ Our Ethos. (n.d.). Retrieved June 9, 2019, from

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