

SAM Manekshaw on Leadership and Discipline

Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw's Lecture at Defence Services College, Wellington on Leadership and Discipline 11th November, 1998 Commandant, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am fully conscious of the privilege, which is mine, to have been invited here to address the college. A while ago, I was invited to a seminar where the subject was youth, and people said that the youth of this country was not pulling its weight, that society generally was not satisfied with how the young were functioning. When I was asked what I thought about it, I said that the youngsters of this country are disappointed, disturbed and confused. They cannot understand why all these untoward things are happening in this country. They want to know who is to blame. Not them. If they want to study at night and there is no power, they want to know who is to blame. Not them. If they want to have a bath, there is no water; they want to know who is to blame. Not them. They want to go to college and university and they are told there are not any vacancies; they want to know who is to blame. Not them. They say – here is a country which was considered the brightest jewel in the British Crown. What has happened to this Bright Jewel?

The problem with us is the lack of leadership.

No longer are there excuses with the old political masters saying that the reason why we are in this state is because we were under colonial rule for 250 years. They turn around and say that the British left us almost fifty years ago. What have you done? They point to Singapore, they point to Malaysia, they point to Indonesia, and they point to Hong Kong. They say that they were also under colonial rule and look at the progress those countries have made.

They point to Germany and to Japan who fought a war for four and a half years- whose youth was decimated and industry was destroyed. They were occupied, and they had to pay reparations; Look at the progress those countries have made. The youngsters want an answer. So, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thought I should give you the answer.

The problem with us is the lack of leadership.

Commandant, Ladies and Gentlemen, do not misunderstand me, when I say lack of political leadership. I do not mean just political leadership. Of course, there is lack of leadership, but also there is lack of leadership in every walk of life, whether it is political, administrative, in our educational institutions, or whether it is our sports organizations. Wherever you look, there is lack of leadership. I do not know whether leaders are born or made. There is a school of thought that thinks that leaders are born. Ladies and Gentlemen, we have a population of 960 million people and we procreate at the rate of 17 million- equaling the total population of Australia- each year, and yet there is a dearth of leadership. So, those of you who still contribute to the fact that leaders are born, may I suggest you throw away your family planning, throw away the pill, throw away any inhibiting factor and make it free for all. Then perhaps someday a leader may be born.

So, if leaders are not born, can leaders be made? My answer is yes. Give me a man or a woman with a common sense and decency, and I can make a leader out of him or her. That is the subject which I am going to discuss with you this morning.

...there is lack of leadership in every walk of life, whether it is political, administrative, in our educational institutions, or whether it is our sports organizations.

What are the attributes of leadership? The first, the primary, indeed the cardinal attribute of leadership is professional knowledge and professional competence. Now you will agree with me that you cannot be born with professional knowledge and professional competence even if you are a child of Prime Minister, or the son of an industrialist, or the progeny of a Field Marshal. Professional knowledge and professional competence have to be acquired by hard work and by constant study. In this fast-moving technologically developing world, you can never acquire sufficient professional knowledge.

You have to keep at it, and at it, and at it. Can those of our political masters who are responsible for the security and defence of this country cross their hearts and say they have ever read a book on military history, on strategy, on weapons developments. Can they distinguish a mortar from a motor, a gun from a howitzer, a guerrilla from a gorilla, though a vast majority of them resemble the latter.

Ladies and Gentlemen, professional knowledge and professional competence are a sine qua non of leadership. Unless you know what you are talking about, unless you understand your profession, you can never be a leader. Now some of you must be wondering why the Field Marshal is saying this, every time you go round somewhere, you see one of our leaders walking around, roads being blocked, transport being provided for them. Those, ladies and gentlemen, are not leaders. They are just men and women going about disguised as leaders – and they ought to be ashamed of themselves!

What is the next thing you need for leadership? It is the ability to make up your mind to make a decision and accept full responsibility for that decision. Have you ever wondered why people do not make a decision? The answer is quite simple. It is because they lack professional competence, or they are worried that their decision may be wrong and they will have to carry the can. Ladies and Gentlemen, according to the law of averages, if you take ten decisions, five ought to be right. If you have professional knowledge and professional competence, nine will be right, and the one that might not be correct will probably be put right by a subordinate officer or a colleague. But if you do not take a decision, you are doing something wrong. An act of omission is much worse than an act of commission. An act of commission can be put right. An act of omission cannot. Take the example of the time when the Babri Masjid was about to be destroyed. If the Prime Minister, at that stage, had taken a decision to stop it, a whole community – 180 million would not have been harmed. But, because he did not take a decision, you have at least 180 million people in this country alone who do not like us.

Professional knowledge and professional competence have to be acquired by hard work and by constant study.

When I was the Army Chief, I would go along to a formation, ask the fellow what have you done about this and I normally got an answer, "Sir, I have been thinking... I have not yet made up my mind," and I coined a Manekshawism. If the girls will excuse my language, it was 'if you must be a bloody fool – be one quickly'. So remember that you are the ones who are going to be the future senior staff officers, the future commanders. Make a decision and having made it, accept full responsibility for it. Do not pass it on to a colleague or subordinate.

So, what comes next for leadership? Absolute Honesty, fairness and justice – we are dealing with people. Those of us who have had the good fortune of commanding hundreds and thousands of men know this. No man likes to be punished, and yet a man will accept punishment stoically if he knows that the punishment meted out to him will be identical to the punishment meted out to another person who has some Godfather somewhere. This is very, very important. No man likes to be superceded, and yet men will accept supercession if they know that they are being superceded, under the rules, by somebody who is better than they are but not just somebody who happens to be related to the Commandant of the staff college or to a Cabinet Minister or by the Field Marshal's wife's current boyfriend. This is extremely important, Ladies and Gentlemen.

We in India have tremendous pressures- pressures from the Government, pressures from superior officers, pressures from families, pressures from wives, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews and girlfriends, and we lack the courage to withstand those pressures. That takes me to the next attribute of Leadership- Moral and Physical Courage.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I do not know which of these is more important. When I am talking to young officers and young soldiers, I should place emphasis on physical courage. But since I am talking to this gathering, I will lay emphasis on Moral Courage. What is moral courage? Moral courage is the ability to distinguish right from wrong and having done so, say so when asked, irrespective of what your superiors might think or what your colleagues or your subordinates might want. A 'yes man' is a dangerous man. He may rise very high, he might even become the Managing Director of a company. He may do anything but he can never make a leader because he will be used by his superiors, disliked by his colleagues and despised by his subordinates. So shallow– the 'yes man'.

...what comes next for leadership? Absolute Honesty, fairness and justice...

I am going to illustrate from my own life an example of moral courage. In 1971, when Pakistan clamped down on its province, East Pakistan, hundreds and thousands of refugees started pouring into India. The Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi had a cabinet meeting at ten o'clock in the morning. The following attended: the Foreign Minister, Sardar Swaran Singh, the Defence Minister, Mr. Jagjivan Ram, the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Rao, and I was also ordered to be present.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is a very thin line between becoming a Field Marshal and being dismissed. A very angry Prime Minister read out messages from Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. All of them saying that hundreds of thousands of refugees had poured into their states and they

did not know what to do. So the Prime Minister turned round to me and said: "I want you to do something".

"Yes, it is my job to tell you the truth. It is my job to fight and win, not to lose."

I said, "What do you want me to do?"

She said, "I want you to enter East Pakistan".

I said, "Do you know that that means War?"

She said, "I do not mind if it is war".

I, in my usual stupid way said, "Prime Minister, have you read the Bible?" And the Foreign Minister, Sardar Swaran Singh (a Punjabi Sikh), in his Punjabi accent said, "What has Bible got to do with this?", and I said, "the first book, the first chapter, the first paragraph, the first sentence, God said, 'let there be light' and there was light. You turn this round and say 'let there be war' and there will be war. What do you think? Are you ready for a war? Let me tell you –it's 28th April, the Himalayan passes are opening now, and if the Chinese gave us an ultimatum, I will have to fight on two fronts".

A 'yes man' is a dangerous man.

Again Sardar Swaran Singh turned round and in his Punjabi English said, "Will China give ultimatum?"

I said, "You are the Foreign Minister. You tell me".

Then I turned to the Prime Minister and said, "Prime Minister, last year you wanted elections in West Bengal and you did not want the communists to win, so you asked me to deploy my soldiers in penny pockets in every village, in every little township in West Bengal. I have two divisions thus deployed in sections and platoons without their heavy weapons. It will take me at least a month to get them back to their units and to their formations. Further, I have a division in the Assam area, another division in Andhra Pradesh and the Armoured Division in the Jhansi-Babina area. It will take me at least a month to get them back and put them in their correct positions. I will require every road, every railway train, every truck, every wagon to move them. We are harvesting in the Punjab, and we are harvesting in Haryana; we are also harvesting in Uttar Pradesh. And you will not be able to move your harvest.

I turned to the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, "If there is a famine in the country afterwards, it will be you to blame, not me." Then I said, "My Armoured Division has only got thirteen tanks which are functioning."

"Because you are the Finance Minister. I have been asking for money for the last year and a half, and you keep saying there is no money. That is why."

The Finance Minister, Mr. Chawan, a friend of mine, said, "Sam, why only thirteen?"

"Because you are the Finance Minister. I have been asking for money for the last year and a half, and you keep saying there is no money. That is why." Then I turned to the Prime Minister and said, "Prime Minister, it is the end of April. By the time I am ready to operate, the monsoon will have broken in that East Pakistan area. When it rains, it does not just rain, it pours. Rivers become like oceans. If you stand on one bank, you cannot see the other and the whole countryside is flooded. My movement will be

confined to roads, the Air Force will not be able to support me, and, if you wish me to enter East Pakistan, I guarantee you a hundred percent defeat.”

“You are the Government”, I said turning to the Prime Minister, “Now will you give me your orders?”

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have seldom seen a woman so angry, and I am including my wife in that. She was red in the face and I said, “Let us see what happens”. She turned round and said, “The cabinet will meet four o’clock in the evening”.

Everyone walked out. I being the junior most man was the last to leave. As I was leaving, she said, “Chief, please will you stay behind?” I looked at her. I said, “Prime Minister, before you open your mouth, would you like me to send in my resignation on grounds of health, mental or physical?”

“No, sit down, Sam. Was everything you told me the truth?”

“Yes, it is my job to tell you the truth. It is my job to fight and win, not to lose.”

She smiled at me and said, “All right, Sam. You know what I want. When will you be ready?”

“I cannot tell you now, Prime Minister”, I said, but let me guarantee you this that if you leave me alone, allow me to plan, make my arrangements, and fix a date, I guarantee you a hundred percent victory”.

“My movement will be confined to roads, the Air Force will not be able to support me, and, if you wish me to enter East Pakistan, I guarantee you a hundred percent defeat.”

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, as I told you, there is a very thin line between becoming a Field Marshal and being dismissed. Just an example of moral courage. Now, those of you who remembered what happened in 1962, when the Chinese occupied the Thag-la ridge and Mr. Nehru, the Prime Minister, sent for the Army Chief, in the month of December and said, “I want you to throw the Chinese out”. That Army Chief did not have the Moral courage to stand up to him and say, “I am not ready, my troops are not acclimatized, I haven’t the ammunition, or indeed anything”. But he accepted the Prime Minister’s instructions, with the result that the Army was beaten and the country humiliated.

Remember, moral courage. You, the future senior staff officers and commanders will be faced with many problems. People will want all sorts of things. You have got to have the moral courage to stand up and tell them the facts. Again, as I told you before, a ‘yes man’ is a despicable man.

This takes me to the next attribute: Physical courage. Fear, like hunger and sex, is a natural phenomenon. Any man who says he is not frightened is a liar or a Gorkha. It is one thing to be frightened. It is quite another to show fear. If you once show fear in front of your men, you will never be able to command. It is when your teeth are chattering, your knees are knocking and you are about to make your own geography- that is when the true leader comes out!

I am sorry but I am going to illustrate this with another example from my own life. I am not a brave man. In fact, I am a terribly frightened man. My wife and I do not share the same bedroom. “Why?” you will ask. Because she says I snore. Although I have told her, No, I don’t. No other woman has ever complained”.

“...but let me guarantee you this that if you leave me alone, allow me to plan, make my arrangements, and fix a date, I guarantee you a hundred percent victory”.

I am not a brave man. If I am frightened, I am frightened of wild animals, I am frightened of ghosts and spirits and so on. If my wife tells me a ghost story after dinner, I cannot sleep in my room, and I have to go to her room. I have often wondered why she tells me these ghost stories periodically.

In World War II, my battalion, which is now in Pakistan, was fighting the Japanese. We had a great many casualties. I was commanding Charlie Company, which was a Sikh Company. The Frontier Force Regiment in those days had Pathan companies. I was commanding the Sikh Company, young Major Manekshaw. As we were having too many casualties, we had pulled back to reorganize, re-group, make up our casualties and promotions.

The Commanding Officer had a promotion conference. He turned to me and said, “Sam, we have to make lots of promotions. In your Sikh company, you have had a lot of casualties. Surat Singh is a senior man. Should we promote him to the rank of Naik?” Now, Surat Singh was the biggest Badmaash in my company. He had been promoted twice or three times and each time he had to be marched up in front of the Colonel for his stripes to be taken off. So I said, “No use, Sir, promoting Surat Singh. You promote him today and the day after tomorrow, I will have to march him in front of you to take his stripes off”. So, Surat Singh was passed over. The promotion conference was over, I had lunch in the Mess and I came back to my company lines. Now, those of you who have served with Sikhs will know that they are very cheerful lot- always laughing, joking and doing something. When I arrived at my company lines that day, it was quite different, everybody was quiet. When my second-in-command, Subedar Balwant Singh, met me I asked him, “What has happened, Subedar Sahib?” He said, “Sahib, something terrible has happened. Surat Singh felt slighted and has told everybody that he is going to shoot you today”.

Surat Singh was a light machine gunner, and was armed with a pistol. His pistol had been taken away, and Surat Singh has been put under close arrest. I said, “All right, Sahib. Put up a table, a soap box, march Surat Singh in front of me”. So he was marched up. The charge was read out- ‘threatening to shoot his Commanding officer whilst on active service in the theatre of war’. That carries the death penalty. The witnesses gave their evidence. I asked for Surat Singh’s pistol which was handed to me. I loaded it, rose from my soap box, walked up to Surat Singh, handed the pistol to him then turned round and told him, “You said you will shoot me”. I spoke to him in Punjabi naturally. I told him, “Have you got the guts to shoot me? Here, shoot me”. He looked at me stupidly and said, “Nahin, Sahib, galtee ho gayaa”. I gave him a tight slap and said, “Go out, case dismissed”.

...there is a very thin line between becoming a Field Marshal and being dismissed.

I went around the company lines, the whole company watching what was happening. I walked around, chatted to the people, went to the Mess in the evening to have a drink, and have my dinner, but when I came back again Sardar Balwant Singh said, “Nahin Sahib, you have made a great mistake. Surat Singh will shoot you tonight”.

I said, “Bulao Surat Singh ko”.

He came along. I said, "Surat Singh, aj rat ko mere tambu par tu pehra dega, or kal subah 6 bjay, mere liye aik mug chai aur aik mug shaving water lana". Then I walked into my little tent.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I did not sleep the whole night. Next morning, at six o'clock, Surat Singh brought me a mug of tea and a mug of shaving water, thereafter, throughout the war, Surat Singh followed me like a puppy. If I had shown fear in front of my men, I should never have been able to command. I was frightened, terribly frightened, but I dared not show fear in front of them. Those of you, who are going to command soldiers, remember that. You must never show fear. So much for physical courage, but, please believe me, I am still a very frightened man. I am not a brave man.

What comes next? The next attribute of leadership is loyalty. Ladies and Gentlemen, you all expect loyalty. Do we give loyalty? Do we give loyalty to our subordinates, to our colleagues? Loyalty is a three way thing. You expect loyalty, you must therefore, give loyalty to your colleagues and to your subordinates. Men and women in large numbers can be very difficult, they can cause many problems and a leader must deal with them immediately and firmly. Do not allow any non sense, but remember that men and women have many problems. They get easily despondent, they have problems of debt, they have problems of infidelity- wives have run away or somebody has an affair with somebody. They get easily crestfallen, and a leader must have the gift of the gab with a sense of humor to shake them out of their despondence. Our leaders, unfortunately, our "so-called" leaders, definitely have the gift of the gab, but they have no sense of humor. So, remember that.

You have got to have the moral courage to stand up and tell them the facts. Again, as I told you before, a 'yes man' is a despicable man.

Finally, for leadership; men and women like their leader to be a man, with all the manly qualities or virtues. The man who says, "I do not smoke, I do not drink, I do not (No, I will not say it)", does not make a leader. Let me illustrate this from examples from the past. You will agree that Julius Caesar was a great leader- he had his Calphurnia, he had his Antonia, he also had an affair with Cleopatra and, when Caesar used to come to Rome, the Senators locked up their wives. And you will agree that he was a great leader. He was known in Rome as every woman's husband and he was a great leader. Take Napoleon, he had his Josephine, he had his Marie Walewska, he had his Antoinette and Georgettes and Paulettes. And you will agree he was a great leader. Take the Duke of Wellington- do you know that the night before the battle of Waterloo, there were more Countesses, Marchionesses and other women in his ante-chamber than staff officers and Commanders. And you will agree he was a great leader. Do you know, Ladies and Gentlemen, a thought has just struck me. All these leaders- Caesar, Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington- they had one facial feature in common, all had long noses.

So much, Ladies and Gentlemen, for leadership, but no amount of leadership will do this country much good. Yes, it will improve things, but what this country needs is discipline. We are the most ill-disciplined people in the world. You see what is happening- you go down the road, and you see people relieving themselves by the roadside. You go into town, and people are walking up and down the highway, while vehicles are discharging all sorts of muck. Every time you pick up a newspaper, you read of a scam or you read of some other silly thing. As we are the most ill-disciplined people in the world, we must do something about discipline.

What is discipline? Please, when I talk of discipline, do not think of military discipline. That is quite different. Discipline can be defined as conduct and behavior for living decently with one another in society. Who lays down the code of conduct for that? Not the Prime Minister, not the Cabinet, nor superior officers. It is enshrined in our holy books; it is in the Bible, the Torah and in the Vedas, it is in the teachings of Nanak and Mohammad. It has come down to us from time immemorial, from father to son, from mother to child. Nowhere is it laid down, except in the Armed Forces, that lack of punctuality is conduct prejudicial to discipline and decent living.

I will again tell you a little story about that. Some years ago, my wife and I were invited to convocation at a university. I was asked to be there at four o'clock. I got into the staff car with my wife, having chased her from about eleven o'clock in the morning. Don't forget, darling, you have got to be on time. Get properly dressed; you have to leave at such and such time'. Eventually, I got her into the car. I told the driver, "Thoda aayisthe, thoda jaldi", but we got to the university and the convocation address place at four o'clock. We were received by the Vice Chancellor and his Lady. We were taken into the convocation hall, and the Vice Chancellor asked me to get on the platform, asking my wife to do so, too. She gracefully declined, and said she much rather sit down below as she seldom had an opportunity of looking up to her husband. Anyway, on the platform, the Vice Chancellor sang my praises. As usual there were 2000 boys and girls who had come for the convocation. There were deans of university, and professors and lecturers. Then he asked me to go to the lectern and address the gathering. I rose to do so and he said (sotto voce), Field Marshal, a fortnight ago we invited a VIP from Delhi for the same function. He was allowed to stand on the same lectern for exactly twenty seconds. I wish you luck. "I said to myself, had the Vice Chancellor mentioned this in his letter of invitation, I wonder, if I should have accepted.

Anyway, I reached the lectern, and I addressed the gathering for my allotted time of forty minutes. I was heard in pin drop silence, and at the end of my talk, was given terrific ovation. The Vice Chancellor and his lady, the Dean, the professors and lecturers, the boys and girls, and even my own wife, standing up and giving me an ovation. After the convocation was over, we walked into the gardens to have refreshments. And I, having an eye for pretty girls, walked up to a pert little thing wearing a pair of tight fitting jeans and a body hugging blouse, and I started a conversation with her. I said, "My dear, why were you so kind to me, I not being an orator nor having the looks of Amitabh Bachhan, when only the other day you treated a VIP from Delhi so shamefully". This pert little thing had no inhibitions.

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She turned round and said, and I quote, "Oh, that a dreadful man! We asked him to come at four o'clock. He came much later and that too accompanied with a boy and a girl, probably his grand children. He was received by the Vice Chancellor and his lady and taken to the platform. He was garlanded by the Student Union President, and he demanded garlands for those brats too. So, the Union President diverged with the garland that was meant for the Vice Chancellor and gave it to the brats. Then the Vice Chancellor started singing the worthy's praises. Whilst he was doing so, this man hitched up his dhoti, exposing his dirty thighs, and scratched away. Then the Vice Chancellor said, "This

man has done so much for the country, he has even been to jail". And I nearly shouted out, 'He should be there now'. Anyway, when the Vice Chancellor asked him to come to the lectern and address the convocation, he got up, walked to the lectern and addressed us thus, 'Boys and girls, I am a very busy man. I have not had time to prepare my speech but, I will now read out the speech my secretary has written'. We did not let him stand there. Without exception, the whole lot of us stood and booed him off the stage."

Now, you see, Ladies and Gentleman, what I mean by discipline. Had this man as his position warranted come on time at four o'clock, fully prepared and properly turned out, can you imagine the good it would have done to these 2000 young girls and boys? Instead of that, his act of indiscipline engendered further indiscipline. I thanked my lucky stars, having been in the Army for so many years, that I arrived there on time, that I had come properly dressed, that I didn't wear a dhoti to show my lovely legs, that I didn't exacerbate an itch or eczema, to hurt the susceptibilities of my audience, by indulging in the scratching of the unmentionables.

Now, Ladies and Gentleman, you understand what I mean by discipline. We are the most ill-disciplined people in the world. So far, all of you have been very, very disciplined. Will you bear with me for another two minutes? Having talked about leadership, having talked about discipline, I want to mention something about Character. We Indians also lack character. Do not misunderstand me, when I talk of character. I don't mean just being honest, truthful, and religious, I mean something more- Knowing yourself, knowing your own faults, knowing your own weaknesses and what little character that we have, our friends, our fans, the 'yes-men' around us and the sycophants, help us reduce that character as well. Let me illustrate this by an example:

Discipline can be defined as conduct and behavior for living decently with one another in society.

Some years ago, Hollywood decided to put up the picture of great violinist and composer, Paganini. The part of Paganini was given to a young actor who was conversant, somewhat, with the violin. He was drilled and tutored to such an extent that when the little piece, the Cadenza, was filmed, it was perfect. When the film was shown, the papers raved about it, and the critics raved about it. And this man's fans, 'yes-men', sycophants, kept on telling him that he was as good a violinist as Heifetz or Menuhin. And do you know that I took eight months in a psychiatric home to rid him of his delusion?

Do you know, Commandant, that the same thing happened to me? After the 1971 conflict with Pakistan, which ended in thirteen days and I took 93000 prisoners, my fans, the 'yes-men' around me, the sycophants, kept on comparing me to Rommel, to Field Marshal Alexander, to Field Marshal Auchinleck, and just as I was beginning to believe it, the Prime Minister created me a Field Marshal and sent me packing to the Nilgiris. A hard-headed, non-nonsense wife deprived a psychiatric home (what we in India call a lunatic asylum), of one more inmate.

I thank you very much indeed. Thank you.

Question: In 1962 war, what was your appointment, were you in a position to do something about the situation?

FM: In the 1962 war, I was disgrace. I was a Commandant of this Institution.

Mr. Krishna Menon, the Defence Minister, disliked me intensely. General Kaul, who was Chief of General Staff at the time, and the budding man for the next higher appointment, disliked me intensely. So, I was in disgrace at the Staff College. There were charges against me – I will enumerate some of them – all engineered by Mr. Krishna Menon.

There were charges against me – I will enumerate some of them – all engineered by Mr. Krishna Menon.

I do not know if you remember that in 1961 or 1960, General Thimayya was the Army Chief. He had fallen out with Mr. Krishna Menon and had sent him his resignation. The Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru, persuaded General Thimayya to withdraw his resignation. The members of Parliament also disliked Mr. Krishna Menon, and they went hammer and tongs for the Prime Minister in Parliament.

The Prime Minister made the following statement, “I cannot understand why General Thimayya is saying that the Defence Ministry interferes with the working of the Army. Take the case of General Manekshaw. The Selection Board has approved his promotion to Lieutenant General, over the heads of 23 other officers. The Government has accepted that.”

I was the Commandant of the Staff College. I had been approved for promotion to Lieutenant General. Instead of making me the Lieutenant General, Mr. Krishna Menon levied charges against me. There were ten charges, I will enumerate only one or two of them – that I am more loyal to the Queen of England than to the President of India, that I am more British than Indian. That I have been alleged to have said that I will have no instructor in the Staff College whose wife looks like an ayah. These were the sort of charges against me.

Then the Chinese came to my help. Krishna Menon was sacked, Kaul was sacked and Nehru sent for me. He said, “General, I have a vigorous enemy. I find out that you are a vigorous General. Will you go and take over?”

For eighteen months my promotion was held back. An enquiry was made. Three Lieutenant Generals, including an Army Commander, sat at the enquiry. I was exonerated on every charge. The file went up to the Prime Minister who sent it up to the Cabinet Secretary, who wrote on the file, ‘if anything happens to General Manekshaw, this case will go will down as the Dreyfus case.’ So the file came back to the Prime Minister. He wrote on it, “Orders may now issue”, meaning I will now become a Lieutenant General. Instead of that, Ladies and Gentleman, I received a letter from the Adjutant General saying that the Defence Minister, Mr. Krishna Menon, has sent his severe displeasure to General Manekshaw, to be recorded. I had it in the office where the Commandant now sits. I sent that letter back to the Adjutant General saying what Mr. Krishna Menon could do with his displeasure, very vulgarly stated. It is still in my dossier.

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I said, "I have been waiting eighteen months for this opportunity," and I went and took over. So, your question was 1962, and what part did I play, none whatsoever, none whatsoever. I was here for eighteen months, persecuted, inquisitions against me but we survive....I rather like the Chinese.

Question: The Army has changed and progressed. Do you find any difference in the mental makeup of the young officers compared to your time?

FM: Over the years, things have changed..... there is a lot of difference, dear. In my time, my father used to support me until I became a Lieutenant Colonel. I used to get an allowance to be able to live. Today, the young officer has not only to keep himself but has to send money home. In my time, we did not have all these courses. The only course I ever did, (of course, we had the four rounds of courses that every officer had to do), but we had mules there so I had to do a course in training mountain mules. Today the young officer hardly stays in his regiment. He is sent from one place to another to do this course and that course, and he does not get a chance of knowing his men. We knew our men. Also there wasn't so much work in those days. We got up in the mornings, did Physical Training for half an hour, came back, dressed, had breakfast, then went to our company lines and spent all our time avoiding the Commanding Officer.

"I will thank you General to know who commands this regiment. Me, and not this young man. I will not have you ticketing him off in front of your daughter."

Those Commanding Officers were nasty chaps. They did not give a damn for anybody. I will give an example of the Commanding Officer. I was made quartermaster of my battalion. The Commanding Officer sent for the Adjutant and myself. He said, I want to take the battalion out tomorrow morning for an exercise. "We did not have motor cars, we had to indent for mules, so, I as quartermaster intended for a company of mules. He said we were going to leave for the exercise at 6:30, so I ordered the company of mules to arrive at six. At eleven o'clock at night, the commanding officer changed his mind. He said, "I will not go at 6:30, we will go at nine o'clock. "There was nothing I could do. I got on my bicycle, went off to the lines, where the mules had arrived. I told them to unsaddle, and go into the shade, when who should arrive on a horse but the Cavalry Officer with his daughter!

I touched my hat. He said, "What are those animals doing here, young man?" I said that we were going out on an exercise.

"When are you going?"

"Nine o'clock."

He tore strips off me – "going at nine o'clock and you have the animals waiting here at six o'clock". He was riding with his daughter on a horse. What could I say to a General officer, I had two pips on my shoulder. Suddenly, who should be coming on a bicycle, but the Commanding Officer! He touched his hat, said, "Morning, General."

Turning to me, he said, "What is the matter, Sam?"

I said, "Sir, the General is angry with me because we are going out at nine o'clock and the mules are here at six."

He turned round to face the General, and said, I will thank you General to know who commands this regiment. Me, and not this young man. I will not have you ticketing him off in front of your daughter."

He turned back to me and said, "Have you had your breakfast, Sam?"

"No."

"Go along. Have your breakfast."

"Please do, Sir. You used to call me 'bloody fool' before. I thought that was my Christian name!"

I was delighted to go off. But when we came back from the exercise, at about eight o'clock in the evening, in my letter rack, was a letter from the General's wife, inviting me to tea the next day. Now, I did not want to have tea with the General's wife! But that's the sort of thing that happens.

When I became the field Marshal, I was the guest of her majesty in England. I had given a reception at India House, where the Commanding Officer with his wife were also invited. He came in, shook hands with my wife, shook hands with me, and walked off. Everybody was drinking. After about half an hour, when everybody had arrived, I walked up to him with a glass of whisky in my hand, and he turned round to me, "May I call you Sam?"

"Please do, Sir. You used to call me 'bloody fool' before. I thought that was my Christian name!"

The difference between the officer now and then – my first confidential report written by him. Before you went in to sign your confidential report, you had to go in front of the Adjutant, beautifully turned out. We did not have any medals in those days. We had to have a sword to go into the CO's office then. I walked in there, saluted the Adjutant, he looked me up and down and said, "You are going to see the Colonel, now? Look at you! Your bloody strap is filthy dirty, look at your belt, it is disgusting. Go on, go and get dressed." I walked out, waited for five minutes and came back.

He looked me up and down, "Much better."

Then he said, "You are going in there. Do you have a fountain pen?"

I said, "Yes."

"The CO will read your report. You will initial on the left hand corner. Is that understood?"

"Yes."

I walked in there, saluted the Colonel, "Mr. Manekshaw reporting, Sir."

He looked me up and down, thrust the report on me online- "This officer, I beg his pardon, this man, may someday become an officer."

I initialed it and walked out.

Khalid Sheikh, another officer from my regiment, who became the Foreign Minister of Pakistan and a Governor there, came out. "Khaled, what report have you got?" I said. He said "Online- this officer tends to be irresponsible". I said, "That's a bad report, Khalid." He said, Uh! Last year the bugger said I was irresponsible."

But we did not mind. Today, if the commanding Officer writes and says this officer is irresponsible, the officer wants to appeal to the President of India saying he is more responsible than the Commanding Officer.

That was the difference, dear. We simply did not give a cuss.

Anything else?

Thank you Gentlemen, thank you for your kindness. Thank you for your patience and your discipline. I am delighted to see you all here.