

Chapter III

Financial Rehabilitation

Although the grateful compatriots could not bring back the fallen heroes alive and ever fill the vacuum in the hearts of those desolate ladies and their children and the next of kin left behind, yet they did all that they could do, to help them rehabilitate financially. Special provisions were made in the rule, as never hitherto to provide the widows of the jawans full pay of the rank last drawn by her husband who died in a battle casualty and the three fourth of it for the widows of the officers. The nation was atoning for the ignoring her earlier heroes who had laid down their lives in a like wise manner and their widows had received merely the ordinary pensionary benefits. A retrospective effect was given for the widows of the 1965 and 1962 wars but their pay slabs on the dates of their husbands' death were comparatively meagre and the price book index had spiralled up and in fact they received very little. Where on earth, recalled Major General D.P. Datta, who was then the Director General of Resettlement, did the widows of soldiers get full pay? A beginning had been made with an meagre retouche though we had still ignored the war widows of the 1948 war.

In some quarters, the feeling was that the problems of the war widows of the previous wars were settled automatically some how, willy nilly, with the lapse of time. After all how long and how far could one go on helping the unfortunate war widows and how could they be treated differently?

from the army widows, whose husbands were not the
 battle casualties or for that matter, ^{from} all the other
 widows in the country and the much worse cases like
 the disabled soldiers and the other hard capped
 destitutes. These are all, according to my judgement
 fallacies which are put forth by vested interest
 though they do have a rationale. The suddenness of
 the situation with which, misery overtook these women
 is justifiable enough to entitle them to the special
 concessions. In the first half an hour, of the outbreak of
 hostilities, Joojivan recalled, ~~that~~ her husband
 Major Amerjit had been captured at the Harsani
 border. In another situation, they were celebrating
 the ceasefire, when a stray shell killed Major vijay
 Datta Chaudhry. Ran Chandra Devi, widow of
 Rifleman Jagat Singh Rana, received the telegram
 of his death, a day after her marriage. The least
 we could do to mitigate their ^{misery} ~~misery~~ was to
 compensate monetarily to tide over the lightning ^{hit}
 of crisis and distress. Who could have a grudge
 to deny them their dues in distress? Response from people
 in general was generous and help and succour came
 to them, from all quarters. Very wisely quite a
 few of the officers had ~~you~~ saved a lot of money and
 some of them had got themselves comprehensively
 insured. Major Amerjit Singh, who had a prominent
 about his premature death, got his general
 insurance policy changed ~~to~~ at a loss and much to
 the violation of his will. Joojivan, to ^{the} ~~comprehensively~~ ^{comprehensively} ~~policy~~
 (while a few had collected actual Provident Fund reserves

While the widow of a 1965 war Havildar got Rs 100 p.m. or p.m. that of the 1971, got Rs 246 p.m. These were the widows of Havildar Omprakash and Havildar Gohri respectively. These disparities existed, not only because of the pay structure, as they stood on the respective dates, but also due to other factors, like disputes, pending loss of discipline and other individual circumstances. There an element of extra award for the decorations is added to this pension. Indira Kaur got Rs 50 p.m. for the Vichhad awarded to her husband Gopalakrishna Kumar while Mrs Parvati Shrivastava gets Rs 75 p.m. for the Mahavir Chakra awarded to her husband Lt Col. Ghai. Chandram Devi widow of Naik Raja Singh ^{the} gets Rs 100 p.m. for the award of Vichhad to her husband.

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Bonds allowances for children's education is given. Mrs Durgawati widow of a Squadron Leader ^{is entitled to} got Rs 280 p.m. respectively for her two ^{young} daughters. But it is never given to her as she ^{complained} the daughters.

Raja Devi, widow of Naik Hare Singh gets Rs 24 p.m. her son while Jivan, widow of Naik Hare Singh gets Rs 240 p.m. ^{for} Funds, Reserves and Awards ^{retires, bounties} - some cases, provident fund accumulations, insurance monies ^{provide adequate} reserves, specially in the case of officers, who seemed to have planned it well money-wise.

For one and a half year, Mrs Revu Dewan received Rs 75 every three months from the ^{Army} ^{Government} ^{and} ^a ^{plot} ^{of} ^{land} ^{for} ^{Rs} ²⁷⁰⁰ ⁽ ^{Group} ^{nominal} ^{is} ^{Rs} ⁵⁰⁰⁰ ^{from} ^{the} ^{Delhi} ^{Development} ^{Authority} ^{).} She receives Rs 10,000 as the ^{provident} ^{fund}. She gets a pension of Rs 1038 p.m. and earns about ^{thousand} ^{rupees} for her gas agency.

In comparison to these handsome emoluments available to an Officer's widow, let me give a typical example of the emoluments received by a Javan's widow. That Chhaila Devi widow of Rifleman Kunt Singh Randhawa killed in 1971 war, got an ex gratia payment of Rs. 1000, with Rs. 500 ^{care} from the ~~UK~~ government Provident Fund returns and a stipend of Rs. 100 per month from the tramp centre, besides the pension of Rs. 146 per month.

Other concessions

Thus besides regular provision of pension, a lot of benefits by way of land, cash in lieu, plots, houses, gas ~~gas~~ and kerosene agencies, ration shops, stipends for self and for children, free education and hostel facilities, provision of living quarters, free for Javan's widows and at nominal rent for the Officer's widows ~~also~~ ^{were} made available to them. Medical facilities at army hospitals, canteen and army supply ration shop provision at concessional or subsidized rates are also being enjoyed by them. Some of the ladies have complained as to why they were not exempted from the payment of sales tax, as they used to be. They were also keen to get the travel concessions which they were entitled to. They were also bittered if the government for not having increased their pension, when they had done it for others. This could not be, as a senior officer explained, for they were given then special considerations on an ad hoc basis. ^{Being} they were treated at par with other pensioners, who didn't get concessions like travel warrants, tax exemptions etc.

By and large, the impression of those gathered is that financially, they have been well looked after. A majority of the war widows, whom I interviewed conceded that they had been able to stand on their own feet. But emotionally they would in their nostalgic moments feel the loss of all the perks they used to enjoy. My husband's colleagues would have become attained senior positions, ~~we were~~ ^{he was} also selected for the staff college. But for this tragedy, we would have got much more. This was a typical reaction.

All out help Although banks came forward, not only to give jobs to the needy, whenever someone was qualified, they gave a lot of loans to the war widows, to build houses. Institutions provided free educational and facilities, which covered the cost of uniforms, stationery, bus fare also. In certain places, free hostel facilities were also extended to these children. Organizations, like the War Widows Association, Cinema Stars, charitable institutions and business houses gave them a lot of money and help. Sewing machines, blankets, pressure cookers and a lot of other useful things were given free to the war widows of Jawahar. In the Pauri Gharwal Centre, I saw the distribution of multivitamins tablets to the inmates, I watched Mrs. Moti Devi Dynamical procure limitless concession and benefits from the highway and ~~for the~~ other - industry - government, for those of the war widows, specially the ones of Jawahar, who were in need of them. Every one, who could do anything ~~they~~ ^{they} ~~had~~ ^{had} not lagged behind to help them in all possible ways. Five years after the war, it was still being done by a lot of selfless social workers and others.

With all this, had come, the financial aspect of these women is alleged to be upset. Frictions, litigations, exploitations, has led to twist and dissipation of a lot of their hard earned assets. Repayment of loans taken at an exorbitant rate as 11% in many cases, to build a small house or a home, even one piece of land given at a very nominal rate, has rent their finances haywire. In certain cases the gas agencies were given in partnership which led to considerable construction in almost all the cases and thus dissipated many of their capital that they got very little for what was otherwise reasonably lucrative business. In the case of the war widows of Jews, things financial difficulties were much more marked. Oppressive in laws had oftentimes, fraudulently taken away almost all of their assets and turned them out of the house, though on paper they were shown as residing with them. They alleged collusion and connivance of authorities and unscrupulous elements in society as a result of which they were deprived of even the meagre financial aid they needed to keep going. In cases where the property was divided specially of the widows of previous wars, the financial assistance available was, pitifully poor. Even in cases where they had been given ration shops, they could not run it on their own and the middle men gave them virtually nothing. So was the plight of the ones who had received kerotome agencies.

All of them, who had had children, pointed it out with
 emphasis that they were only living for them and the
 expenses for their upkeep would be going up as the taxes
 were heading towards collapse and the daughters would,
 before long, become of marriageable age. Quite a few
 of them argued that the pensionary benefits that
 they received were not commensurate with the alarming
 increase in the cost of living index. Besides they were
 convinced that interest of the voluntary organisations, even of
 the government and people in general, in their wellbeing,
 was waning under the belief that they were already
 well off. ^{many} Status-conscious widows of officers, who
 were now ~~women~~ underpay the drudgery of a hard labor
 working women, complained that they had to sell away their
 cars, for they could no longer afford to keep one.
 Most of them would not admit that the relief measure
 was adequate and there included some officers' own
 widows who hailed from very well to do families
 some of them had had additional assets of their own.
 Perhaps more, widow of a Squadron leader, own a house
 in Vasant Vihar. In some cases the parents or the in-laws
 belonged to the rich upper class strata of society or ~~some~~
~~had~~ occupied senior positions in civil and defence
 services. Even in the case of war widows of jawans,
 they owned acreable lands and houses. But when it came
 to day to day living, they said they did not or could not
 partake of this prosperity.

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Their liabilities were increasing day by day, they said
and their debts were mounting and at best, they were
living at a respectable subsistence level. They
did not want to sound ingrateful or belittle ~~the~~
all that had been done for them by a benevolent govern-
ment and loving people. Some of them have even started
bitter and disillusioned. One said, that the Special Cell
created for them - the Defense Ministry had done nothing
white another alleged that the War Widows Association
had rendered no service to the war widows.
'When has the show money disappeared', she asked, referring
to a charitable function held to raise funds for them.
Sailors, soldiers and Airman Board was also found to be
a body of retired people, who had rehabilitated them
selfes more than the poor war widows. And their lack
of sympathy was obvious - their typical utterance and
attitude and utterance, 'Jeh Jali to haweshe rot hi
rahti hain' (They always keep on crying), as ^{alleged} brought out
- the allegation of a bitter war widows - sympathy -
my foot', she said with all the agony of a disillusioned
women. The authorities in turn alleged that the tragedy
had unhinged her mind. This was a stray reaction
otherwise normally, I found them, even when talked
about their financial constraints, 'keep up a
cheerful continuance outlook.'

And even at the time of talking about most miserable aspects of their emotional and financial rehabilitation, they were not without their sense of humour. In reply to question of mine about having ^{undergone any} ~~less~~ ^{any} things after the tragedy, Mrs Kishai blandly quipped that she had ^{since} learnt how to drive a car. With the good humoured approach of the Parjals, Jagdwin Josivan Amerjeet Dyt and Gumpudra Wani, from Patiala, had helped me build up my morale when at a time when I was asking them about pathetic points: 'I believe he is alive', said the former cheerfully; 'then why should I behave like a widow'. Parvati Shai had a sublime smile on her face when she talked about the iron-worm confidence of her husband, based on astrological predictions - mere beal bike nahu hoga (no harm will come to me) which took her to the supreme act of courage and sacrifice undauntedly. Even the widows of Jawans were not without their snideful quips. One had had a dig at us 'Many like you have come and gone away after taking such notes (note kar ke le gaye) what we need are the other notes to make respectable and reasonable living? And what is the large and confidence of the brave widows of our warriors who still seemed to fight the battle for their emotional, social, psychological and above all financial rehabilitation