

# BLUE TO PURPLE

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*This paper is the author's thoughts on being posted to HQ IDS. It gives a practical perspective on the need for jointness and the problems of not having a CDS.*

“Come on friend start thinking Purple now, you are no more Blue”, these words hit me soon after I was recently posted to HQ IDS (Integrated Defence Staff). They came as a shock to me and I wondered how a man like me, who had been a hard core blue blooded creature for nearly 37 years, would be able to think purple !

What do they mean by saying think purple anyway? Do they want me to forget that I am an Air Force officer? Does it mean that I should think more for and from the point of view of Army and Navy and not the Air Force? Perhaps it means that I should be impartial in my thought process when it comes to issues concerning other Services as well. And just because I am from the Air Force and to prove that I am a good purple officer, I should perhaps vote more in favour of the other Services in matters which affect equally to all just to show that I am not partial towards Air Force!

Right from our young days we all are brought up in an environment to strongly believe in our Service and to uphold its

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tenets. Almost each one of us believes in his Service as staunchly as some of us

believe in our religion. To many Air Force officers, Air Power is like a religion – the right path to Nirvana – to total happiness – to victory.

As we grow up in Service, we come across some Mullahs (senior role models) who influence our thought process a great deal. Also, we are made to go through various madrassas (courses run by various schools and colleges of each Service) and we tend to believe that the path of Air Power or Naval Power or Ground Power, depending upon the Service one is in, is the right path to victory. Having grown up in such an environment how is one expected to suddenly go purple and that too at such a late stage in one's Service career? That was my dilemma.

For years I had seen officers who could not do any sort of joint thinking even within their own Service. In each Service we have created divisions (some sort of caste system), for example in the Army, we have the Armoured Corps, Air Force has its fighter pilots and the Navy probably has its submariners or other Executive Officers who think they are the Brahmins of the Force – a class above the others. These people sort of look down upon those who belong to the supporting arms – akin to Brahmins looking down with disdain at those belonging to other castes. Even within a Service we have failed to think from the point of view of the other

arm then how can one expect any kind of purple thinking and jointmanship when it comes to other Services?

When it comes to inter-service thinking, the Army thinks it is the prime Service and that the other two Services have been created to mainly support it in war so all priorities should be given to it. The Navy and the Air Force are obviously not in tune with this thought process. Of late, the Air Forces all over the world feel that the Army is worth only for mopping up operations at the end and that the main job of breaking the enemy is done primarily from the air. The Navy too has its own arguments and talks of protecting our Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and their importance to the economic growth of the country and hence wants a bigger chunk of the defence budget and more attention. Thus there is no confluence in the thought process even at very senior levels – so what is all this talk of thinking purple?

So were my initial thoughts when I was posted to the IDS as Deputy Chief Integrated Defence Staff Operations (DCIDS-Ops). It was only after two-three months of exposure to the business being conducted in the IDS that I realised how wrong I was and that it was quite possible to turn purple without much difficulty. There were many issues, small and big, which

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came to my notice on which the three Services could not come to a unanimous decision. Despite protracted correspondence and any number of meetings, the issues had remained

unresolved. Even the Chairman COSC was unable to sort them out which meant that the matter had to be taken to some outside agency to seek resolution and this agency invariably was the bureaucracy of MoD. This meant that the internal matters were being exposed to outsiders who invariably took advantage or could take, if they wanted to.

As some say, “Keep the pot boiling – keep the infighting between the three Services alive so that they will remain subservient to the MoD”, is perhaps the strategy of the Govt and hence this delay in appointing a CDS. The best way to counter this perhaps would be to sort out all the differences amongst ourselves and present a common front to the Government, and IDS I realised was perhaps the best organisation to achieve this. But sorting out the differences is not an easy task. It calls for a lot of give and take. And that is where not just purple thinking but purple “give and take” comes in.

Prior to the creation of IDS, it was with great difficulty that the officers of the three Services got together at different levels for fruitful discussions on various contentious issues (so I am told). They also had no mediator or an umpire to ensure that some decision was taken at the end. Raising ones voice to disproportionate levels during discussions, not letting others express their views, making derogatory and sarcastic remarks about other Services and such other activities were considered as plus points and a pat on the back was often earned by indulging in them. In these meetings, the participants would invariably not arrive at a consensus leaving the issues unresolved.

With the creation of IDS and with very senior officers of all three Services posted in this organisation, when issues with differing opinions or for that matter any issues concerning all three Services, are referred to them, they have enough time to discuss them holistically from the Armed Forces point of view rather than from the point of view of any particular Service (sort of purple discussion). Adequate thought can be given to various aspects like compatibility, inter-operability, commonality, inter-service priority etc. Such purple discussions are particularly very important in issues related to procurement of new equipment, joint exercises, C<sup>4</sup>I<sup>2</sup> aspects, joint doctrine, SOPs for joint operations, intelligence related issues etc. IDS, thus ensures that proper in-depth study is carried out and necessary recommendations are put up to Vice Chiefs' Committee or to Chairman COSC for taking appropriate decision.

COSC functions on the basis of consensus and the Chairman does not

have the veto power or the power to force a decision on any Chief should he disagree and that is when the need for CDS is acutely felt. In the absence of CDS, if there are any issues on which the three Chiefs do not agree, then these perforce have to be referred to the MoD which finally does give a decision which may not be in favour of one or more Chiefs. So instead of MoD doing this, it would be so much better if Chairman COSC is given the authority to do the needful – till CDS is appointed.

Having come and worked for a while in IDS, I do feel that my good old parochial way of thinking has been replaced to some extent by a more broad minded thought process which would not have been possible had I remained in the confines of Vayu Bhavan and IAF Command HQs. In my opinion, it is very necessary for every officer to have a stint in IDS at some stage or the other – earlier the better. It will certainly help to broaden his horizon.

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**Air Marshal AV Vaidya** was born on 21 Feb 1948. An alumnus of the National Defence Academy and the National Defence College, he was commissioned into the fighter stream of the Indian Air Force in Dec 1968. He has over 3000 hours of accident free fighter flying on various aircraft like the Gnat, Hunter, MiG-21 and Mirage-2000. The officer has commanded a Mirage Squadron, a premier air base and has also been the Director of Air Staff Requirements at Air HQs. He was the Air Defence Commander and subsequently the Senior Air Staff Officer of an Operational Command. Presently he is the Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (policy, Planning and Force Development) at HQ IDS. Air Marshal AV Vaidya is a recipient of the Vayu Sena Medal.