

Inspired by General Musharraf's visit to the Staff College in Quetta, on the eve of its centenary celebrations early this month, Ikram Sehgal, in his article "An institution to be proud of" (April 7), recalls his personal experiences of the college. He concludes thus: "Producing an outstanding lot of officers for the Army and the nation over the years, this is an institution that the entire nation can certainly be proud of."

Mr Sehgal admits he has drawn from his childhood memories of the college. In the early fifties, he lived with his parents on its campus. The memories of glittering medallions, ceremonial dresses, colourful ribbons, shining brass, polished shoes, turbaned orderlies, agile barman, spear-wielding doorman, high legings, antique chandeliers, classic pictures and period furniture, reinforced by the beating of drums, the sounds of bugles and sirens, the zipping of ponies and unfurling of flags are deeply imprinted on his mind.

But brass and band, sound and fury, form and ceremony alone do not make institutions worthy of pride.

For an institution to be truly proud of, it must produce individuals that a nation can be proud of. A nation is proud of individuals who lift a people with their dreams, not those who dream of losing themselves on the people's backs. Spoiling their dreams, individuals who inspire respect and loyalty, not demand it. The quality of its product is what distinguishes a great institution from an ordinary one. It produces individuals whom people yearn to follow.

not want to chase out.

This is not to say that the Staff College has not produced bright and brilliant officers who have made great sacrifices in the defence of the country. In this, the names of so many illustrious officers come to mind that to mention just one or two would be to be unfair to so many more. The nation not only values their sacrifices but, as a token of its pride, has honoured them as well.

But honours and accolades bestowed have not stopped some individuals from becoming dizzy with power and puff. The true worth of an institution, therefore, lies not in merely imparting training to produce professionally competent officers but in how its alumni return the honours to a nation, which it gave them in the first place.

How often and how many of them fell victim to the dizziness of height, honours and accolades? How many were able to keep their feet firmly planted on the ground? And this has a lot to do with the quality of education they were given at the institution.

That is the question which the Staff College or, for that matter, all military training institutions have to answer to become "the nation's pride." It is a question that has begged an answer ever since the Quaid-e-Azam first raised it in his address to the officers of the college during his visit of June 14, 1948.

In my talks with senior officers of the

# 'An institution to be proud of' - but really?

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Brass and band, form and formality and pomp alone do not make institutions worthy of pride. As to the quality of education at the Staff College in Quetta, there's a basic question that has begged an answer ever since it was first raised by the Quaid-e-Azam in his address to the officers during his visit there on June 14, 1948

army, I discovered that they did not fully understand the implications of the oath taken by the troops of Pakistan," he said, and then asked: "Why?" The Quaid refreshed their memory by reading out from the prescribed oath to them.

"I solemnly affirm, in the presence of Almighty God, that I owe allegiance to the Constitution and the Dominion of Pakistan," the Quaid read from the oath. He then raised his forefinger, and in a voice stirring with conviction, said, "Mark the words Constitution and the government of the Dominion of Pakistan."

There was a prolonged pause and a deafening silence. The Quaid then resumed and asked them to study the constitution, which was in force in Pakistan at the time and understand its true constitutional and legal implications. Remember, he said in a tone as if to warn, "the executive authority flows from the head of the government, and therefore any command or orders that may come to you can

not come without the sanction of the Executive Head."

Clearly, the Quaid was pointing towards a fundamental flaw in the "military education par excellence" imparted at the Staff College, as they say, indeed at all military training institutions. He was not impressed by the brass and band.

General Musharraf's visit to the college early this month has only served to highlight the question the Quaid had raised.

In 1948, the Quaid made it a point to warn officers against indulging in politics. In 2005 General Musharraf made it a point to reassure them that they were doing was not politics, but professional soldiering pure and simple. I am sure there was no expression of disbelief on the faces of the officers when General Musharraf denied that the army was in politics. What else is a headlong fall if not this?

What "education par excellence" is being

imparted to officers at the college when a president in uniform teaches those receiving the education there to believe that he is merely army chief, not doing any politics? One day the army chief, dressed in battle fatigue and donning a tribal turban, enters the venue to address a political rally organised by a political party in the protection of military commandos. The next day he claims in the college that the army is not involved in politics, but only in professional soldiering.

Every member of the armed forces takes an oath under the Constitution. The oath reads: "I... do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Pakistan and uphold the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which embodies the will of the people, that I will not engage in any political activity whatsoever, and that I will honestly and faithfully serve Pakistan in the Pakistan Army [Navy or Air Force] as required by and under the law."

May Allah Almighty help and guide me. Armeen

When the officers are taught that "I will not engage in any political activity whatsoever," what are they taught to do when they climb up the ladder? Should the nation be proud of it? I do not know. I really do not want to know.

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