



## A HOMAGE TO OUR BRAVE SOLDIERS

### SUMMARY

The following chapter consists of a pair of letters written between two friends. The first letter is written by Soumya to her friend Ananda. In the letter, she describes her trip to the National War Memorial. The second letter is Ananda's reply to Soumya's letter in which she talks about her visit to a war memorial as well as shares a patriotic poem written by Makhanlal Chaturvedi. The chapter is patriotic in nature and remembers the sacrifices of the brave soldiers of the Indian army.

### Part - I

#### Letter to Ananda

Soumya writes a letter to her friend Ananda narrating her visit to a war memorial which is located in New Delhi. They previously had a talk regarding India's struggle for Independence and on the topic of 'war and peace'. Since then, she has been constantly wondering about these brave Indian people who fought to defend the sovereignty and integrity of the nation. She wondered if anyone remembered those brave soldiers.

In the letter, she added that she got the chance to visit the 'National War Memorial' site as part of her educational trip and got the answer to her questions. Soumya explained to Ananda about her tour.

#### Trip to National War Memorial

The National War memorial is located near India gate. It was planned and then inaugurated by India's Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in February, 2019. Its construction started in April 2018 and completed in February 2019. The memorial is spread over 40 acres of land.

Soumya's teacher explained that India had to fight many wars even after Independence, and that the freedom and security we enjoy was because of the

sacrifices of the brave Indian Armed forces. The memorial was built to remember the sacrifices of these brave soldiers by engraving their names on each brick, which is referred to as a tablet. Currently, the 29,000 tablets are etched with more than 26,000 names of martyred countrymen. These martyred soldiers fought courageously in different wars, including the Indo-China conflict in 1962, Indo-Pak Wars in 1965 and 1971, and the infamous Kargil War in 1999.

### **India's Wartime Gallantry Awards**

Soumya, then, wrote about the 21 bravehearts who were awarded the Param Vir Chakra (PVC) which is India's highest wartime gallantry medal for the service to the nation. This award is followed by Maha Vir Chakra (MVC), Kirti Chakra (KC), Vir Chakra (VrC) and Shaurya Chakra (SC).

Major Somnath Sharma was given India's first PVC after his death because of his bravery in the Battle of Badgam in 1947. Later, many more PVCs were awarded during the Indo-China Conflict in 1962, Indo-Pakistan War in 1965, and UN Peacekeeping operations in Congo. Some heroes who were awarded the PVC after their death are Flying Officer Nirmal Jit Singh Sekhon, Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, and Major Hoshiyar Singh. Captain Mahendra Nath Mulla from the Navy was awarded an MVC for his exemplary courage and leadership.

### **The Tale of Lance Naik Albert Ekka**

Lance Naik Albert Ekka was awarded the PVC after his death in the 1971 War. His story of courage is extremely inspiring. He was in the Battalion of the Brigade of Guards during their attack on the enemy defense at Gangasagar on the Eastern front. He noticed a Light Machine Gun killing his fellow soldiers and charged the enemy bunker. He killed two enemy soldiers and destroyed the Light Machine Gun that was killing his fellow soldiers. He had many injuries after this but continued to fight and clear another enemy bunker.

Even though he was gravely injured, he crawled forward and threw a grenade into another bunker. He killed the enemy and silenced the Medium Machine Gun, saving the lives of his fellow soldiers. He ensured the victory of his company but died due to his serious injuries.

### **Amar Jawan Jyoti**

Soumya wrote that they also visited another important installation called "Amar Jawan Jyoti". It is an immortal flame that is kept ablaze throughout the day and night to remember the soldiers of the country. It was lit under India Gate in January 1972 to remember India's victory in the Indo-Pak War of 1971.

When the National War Museum was inaugurated, Prime Minister Modi lit a new lamp. Later, the old lamp was merged into it.

It is included in the obelisk (pillar) of the National War Memorial which is surrounded by four chakras. They surround the 15-metre-tall central obelisk, Amar Jawan Jyoti.

### **The Four Chakras**

- *The innermost circle* is called the ‘Amar Chakra’, or ‘Circle of Immortality’. This has the Obelisk with Eternal Flame. The Amar Jawan Jyoti flame symbolizes the immortality of the spirit of fallen soldiers with the assurance that the nation will never forget their sacrifice.

- *The second circle* is called ‘Veerta Chakra’ or ‘Circle of Bravery’. There is a covered gallery that exhibits six of our armed forces' valiant battle actions in bronze murals.

- *The third circle* is called ‘Tyag Chakra’ or ‘Circle of Sacrifice’. The circular concentric walls of honor symbolize the ancient war formation which is called Chakravyuh. The walls are covered with granite tablets and individual tablets are solely dedicated to each fallen hero of post-Independent India. Their names are etched in golden letters.

- *The outermost circle* is called ‘Raksha Chakra’ or the ‘Circle of Protection’. In this chakra, the row of trees is a reassurance to the citizens of the country about their safety against any threat. Each tree represents the soldiers who ensure the territorial integrity of the nation.

### **Soumya's Emotions**

Soumya added that they had spent the whole day at the National War Memorial and the surroundings of Amar Jawan Jyoti and the lush green gardens and buildings around Kartavyapath. The overall environment created a calm experience for her and they developed a bond with the place. After the educational trip, the class decided to make presentations on stories of the bravehearts about their courage and valour.

Soumya decided to present the story of Major Padampani Acharya who was awarded an MVC in the 1999 Kargil War. After writing about Major Padampani Acharya, Soumya ended the letter.

## **The Tale of Major Padampani Acharya**

Major Acharya was a Company Commander who was given the task of capturing a heavily protected enemy position. With extraordinary bravery, he advanced through the enemy bullets and threw grenades. Even though he was seriously injured, he told his men to leave him and continue the attack while he kept throwing grenades into the enemy position. After the completion of the mission, he died due to his injuries. Thus, Major Padampani Acharya showed immense bravery and courage and gave up his life for the country. He had written a letter to his father before the battle. It contained a Sanskrit shloka from the holy book Bhagavad Gita which inspires a soldier to do his duty and fight for his country without the fear of death.

## **Part – II**

### **Ananda's Letter to Soumya**

Ananda wrote a reply to the letter sent by Soumya. She appreciated Soumya's observations, sensitivity, and deep gratitude towards the brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives to protect the nation. While some people might see the memorial as just a monument or a statue to celebrate a war or victory, it is indeed a tribute to commemorate the supreme sacrifices made by these great people. Ananda felt motivated to join the Armed Forces. Ananda praised Soumya's teachers for planning the trip.

Ananda added that Soumya's letter reminded her of the time when she visited a war memorial in Chandigarh city on National Martyrs Day.

### **Pushp ki Abhilasha**

Ananda shared a poem titled 'Pushp ki Abhilasha' written by Makhanlal Chaturvedi with Soumya which she remembered when she saw the flowers dedicated to the soldiers. The poem talks about the desires of a flower. The flower doesn't wish to decorate some beautiful woman's hair or be offered as a garland to the gods. The flower desires to be thrown on the path on which the brave soldiers of the country walk.

After writing the poem, Ananda added that she feels immense respect for the Armed forces who are always on alert. Under their guarded environment, the citizens are able to enjoy peace and have the luxury of exchanging ideas with friends. Then, she expressed her wish to visit the National War Memorial as well.

## Tiger of Drass

In her letter, Ananda mentioned that she recently learned about Captain Anuj Nayyar who was awarded the MVC after his death due to his bravery and courage in the Kargil War of 1999. His mother Meera Nayyar has written a memoir of his life titled 'Tiger of Drass – Capt. Anuj Nayyar – 23 – Kargil Hero'. She wrote this memoir so that the world will remember the sacrifice of her brave son.

Lastly, Ananda shared the discovery of an app called 'National War Memorial and Museum' which is very interactive and answers questions in 21 languages. She also briefly mentioned her hobby of stamp collection, which is also called philately. She recently received a stamp that celebrates India's Independence.

## Word – Meaning

Word	Meaning
Philately	a collection of postage stamps
Memoir	an account of one's personal life and experiences
Devastation	damage and destruction
Inconsequential	of no importance
Sovereign	possessing supreme or ultimate power
Edifice	a large, imposing building
Platoon	a subdivision of a company of soldiers
Artillery	large caliber guns used in warfare on land
Granite	a light-colored rock found in mountainous areas
Co-centric	arranged circles with the same center
Interminable	apparently endless
Valiant	courageous or very brave
Mural	a large picture on a wall
Wreaths	circular arrangement of flowers used in funerals
Obelisk	tapering stone pillar

Commemorate	remember officially and give respect
Undaunted	not afraid of anything
Casualties	deaths in warfare or other accidents
Succumbed	to yield or give in
Bayoneted	stabbed
Shelling	gunfire
Conspicuous	noticeable
Exemplary	excellent, serving as a desirable model
Citation	meritorious performance of duty
Personnel	people engaged in an organized undertaking such as military service
Posthumously	after death
Gallantry	exceptional courage especially in battle
Etched	engraved
Memorial	a structure established to remind people of a person or an event
Aspiration	a hope or ambition
Tribute	showing respect, gratitude
Iconic	celebrated
Inaugurated	install or put something into use or action
Envisioned	visualized
Territorial integrity	safeguarding nation's borders
Braveheart	a brave person
Patriotism	devotion to one's country