

Women in the Indian Armed Forces: Scope and limitation

Maj (Dr) Anil Balhera, Asst. Professor, Dept of Laws, BPS Women University, Khanpur-Kalan, Sonapat, Haryana)

Abstract: The Defence forces career is treated as dominated bastion for male but with the pace of time women had shown extreme courage & spirit in different walks of life & political mightly as well as red ribbon bearing top generals were forced to rethink about induction of women in non-combat role & after analysing their performance, combat entry is also knocking the door for them. Recently, three women were inducted into fighter pilot cadre just for experimentation into Air Force & trio had come with sparking enthusiasm & good flying report & likely to open door for rest who are in legitimate hope. Delhi H.C. decision in Kush kalra on 5th Jan 18 may be a benchmark for women into olive dress profession.

Keywords: Equality, Defence forces, Performance, Commission, Combat, Spirit, Courage, warfare.

Introduction

In the modern world, there are no domains of work that women haven't delved into. Words such as chairman and cameraman have been rephrased as chairperson and cameraperson, to accommodate women. Many a male dominated work place has crumbled under the power of the woman - her spirit and energy. The Indian Armed Forces, which for long was considered a male dominated workplace, now has confident, bold women, molding into every role and setting examples for everyone.

In 1888, the role of women in the Indian army began when the "Indian Military Nursing Service" was formed during the British Raj. During 1914-45, Indian Army nurses fought in World War I (1914-18) and World War II (1939-45), where 350 Indian Army nurses either died or were taken prisoner of war or declared missing in action.

In 1992, the Indian Army began inducting women officers in non-medical roles. On 19 January 2007, the United Nations first all female peacekeeping force made up of 105 Indian policewomen was deployed to Liberia.

PriyaJhingan, commissioned in 1993, is the first woman to join the Indian Army as an officer. Sapper Shanti Tigga is the first female jawan (private rank) in the Indian Army who joined in 2011. Priya Semwal, joined in 2014, first Army jawan's wife to join as an officer in the armed forces, whose husband had fallen in a counter-insurgency operation near hilly Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh in 2012.

Mitali Madhumita (Lieutenant Colonel), commissioned in 2000, is the first woman officer in India to receive a gallantry award, who received the Sena Medal in 2011 for exemplary courage shown during the Attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul by terrorists in Kabul, Afghanistan on 26 February 2010, and operations in Jammu-Kashmir and the northeast states.

The Indian armed forces comprises of Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard. The Coast Guard was set up as an Armed Force more recently in 1978. Due to their unique roles as protectors of the nation's land, sea and airspace respectively, the nature of work in each service is different. Apart from their main roles of defending the country, they may also be required to perform tasks to ease civil administration during times of crisis. The Indian president is the supreme commander of the armed forces. In carrying out the primary role of defending the nation, the armed forces personnel are bound by certain rules that govern their conduct. But, they also enjoy certain privileges that their civilian counterparts do not have access to. Passion for adventure activities and sports can pay off, as one can represent the defense teams and even the country.

Bright, young and energetic men and women make up the bulk of manpower in the armed forces. Recruitment is voluntary, which implies that every citizen of India is eligible to be a part of it, provided he/she fulfils the specified criteria for selection. Caste, region or religion, do not come in the way of the selection process, thereby making it a heterogeneous work place. Personnel retire earlier than many other government sectors, to keep the armed forces team, young and dynamic. Manpower in each of the services is broadly divided into 'Commissioned officers', 'JCO's (Junior Commissioned Officers)' and 'Other Ranks' based on their qualifications and seniority.

Entry of Women

The role of women in the armed forces for a long time, was limited to the medical profession i.e. doctors and nurses. In 1992, the doors were thrown open for women entry as regular officers in aviation, logistics, law, engineering and executive cadres. Thousands of spirited young women applied against advertisements and it was a turning point in the history

of time. These women chose a new field where they had to painstakingly pave a path for the others to follow.

The initial adjustment problems weren't as much for the women as it was for the men. Wrapped in their tradition of chivalry and respect to women, most gentlemen officers could not treat their female counterparts at par with themselves. Their subordinates too, were men who came from conservative families where they saw women playing only traditional roles. The emergence of these women into totally male dominated bastions did initially create embarrassing moments for both. Men hushed their talks and behaved courteously, while women had to do with makeshift arrangements to suit their needs within units. Over the years and having come a long way now, men have realized that these women in uniform are their efficient and able co-workers. The time is not far when we may use the term 'sisters-in-arms' as equivalent to 'brothers-in-arms'.



Currently, women in the non-medical cadre, serve as Short Service Commissioned (SSC) officers. Under this type of commission, they can serve in the armed forces for a period ranging from 5-14 years. On release they can pursue a career in the civil sector. SSC officers are released with gratuity and can avail some benefits as ex-servicemember, but they do not get pension. Women in the medical branch i.e. doctors and nurses can serve as Permanent Commissioned (PC) officers and are eligible for pension after retirement. They also have the option to serve as Short Service Commissioned officers.

Eligible women, who qualify various tests successfully, serve as Short Service Commissioned officers in the following branches of the Armed Forces.

ARMY: EME, Signals, Engineers, Army Education Corps, Army Ordnance Corps, Army Service Corps, Intelligence and Judge Advocate General's branch.

NAVY: All branches of the Navy (except submariners and divers).

AIR FORCE: Flying (transport aircraft and helicopters), Technical and Administration branches.

COAST GUARD: All branches of the Coast Guard.

Presently, Females are not allowed to serve in combat units like the Infantry, the Armoured corps and Mechanised infantry.

The Territorial Army Entry: As of now, it is not there but with decision of Delhi H.C (Kush Kalra v.UOI) on 5th Jan 18, it had opened the door for women also.

An Officer and a Lady

In the modern day of electronic warfare, it's more about overcoming stress in warfare than physical combat. It has been proven scientifically that women handle stress better and are also mentally tougher. This is not to undermine a woman's physical capability. Women have done extremely well in physical training as well. In the first few batches at the armed forces training academies women displayed more endurance and some even outran their male counterparts in cross-country runs and long distance marches. They carry on this tradition and keep setting new records.

As commissioned officers at the age of 22-23 years, they may often have subordinates older than their parents. Hence, from day one, it is a challenge and leadership qualities are under test. The color of their crisp uniforms and the stars/stripes they adorn differentiate them from each other. Despite the good quality of life, they may sometimes undergo hardships due to the nature of work. An officer may have to work in tough terrains or difficult circumstances. Most women however, who undergo training as cadets in various military academies, cope up with various difficult situations, easily. Being a transferable job, transfers and movements are seen as unique travel opportunities to travel to remotest locations in the country. Every unit is a mini-India with people and cultures as diverse.

As most lady officers are married to gentlemen officers in the armed forces, as per government policies, they are transferred together. Women officers can also avail of maternity leave; furlough and annual leave in succession, to cater to pre and post-natal care. On retirement too, they enjoy medical facilities and coveted club memberships. They can afford to maintain the same quality of life due to the various benefits they can avail of. Their experience and qualities imbibed while in service make them much in demand in the private sector.

In a transformational move, the Indian Army is all set to open up combat positions for women, a gender barrier broken by only a few countries globally. Army Chief Gen Bipin Rawat said the process to allow women in combat role, currently an exclusive domain of men, is moving fast and initially women will be recruited for positions in military police.

“I am looking at women coming as jawans. I am going to start it soon. Firstly, we will start with women as military police jawans,” he said, giving details of the move to allow women in the male-dominated positions in the Army. Currently women are allowed in a number of select areas including in medical, legal, educational, signals and engineering wings of the Army but combat roles are kept off limit for them due to operational concerns and logistical issues.

The Army Chief said he was ready to recruit women as jawans and the matter is being taken up with the government. “We have already started the process,” Gen Rawat told PTI in an exclusive interaction recently. He said women will have to show grit and strength in taking up challenges in combat role and shattering the glass ceiling.

Very few countries including Germany, Australia, Canada, the US, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, Sweden and Israel have allowed women in combat roles. The roles of military police include policing the cantonments and army establishments, prevent breach of rules and regulations by soldiers, maintaining movement of soldiers as well as logistics during peace and war, handling prisoners of war and extending aid to civil police whenever required.

Creating history, the Indian Air Force, last year, had inducted three women as fighter pilots, less than a year after the government decided to open the fighter stream for women on an experimental basis. A decision on having women as fighter pilots will be taken after evaluating performance of the three women — Avani Chaturvedi, Bhawana Kanth and Mohana Singh who are now part of IAF’s fighter squadron.

The Indian Navy is currently deliberating on a policy on having women onboard the ships. The Navy allows women in various other segments including in legal, logistics, naval architecture and engineering departments.

The World wide scan of Women Entry in Combat:

In *Kush Kalra V. UOI*, decided by the Delhi H.C on 5th Jan 2018), GOI had submitted her support of the submission that the recruitment of women in combat roles does not actually impact operational effectiveness of the armed forces, Mr. Gautam Narayan, ld. *amicus curiae* has placed the following tabulation of countries which allow women to serve even in combat roles in its defence forces, along with the year from which they were so allowed :

<i>"Sr.No.</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>Year from which women were allowed in combat roles</i>
(i)	North Korea	1950
(ii)	Netherlands	1979
(iii)	Sweden	1989
(iv)	Canada	1989
(v)	Denmark	1988
(vi)	Norway	1985
(vii)	Spain	1999
(viii)	Eritrea	1998
(ix)	France	1998
(x)	Israel	1995
(xi)	Finland	1994
(xii)	Lithuania	2000
(xiii)	Germany	2000
(xiv)	New Zealand	2001
(xv)	Romania	2002
(xvi)	Poland	2004
(xvii)	Australia	2011

I hope the MOD will not file an appeal in the Supreme Court to neutralise the decision of *Kushi Kalra* case.

Conclusion

Employment of women officers in the Indian Armed Forces is no longer an issue to be trifled with. Their track record in the areas of expertise that they have been employed in so far clearly indicates they have performed admirably and in fact, evinces a great degree of confidence in the organisation. With the IAF already having women pilots to fly fighter jets, the decision to induct women in combat roles in both the navy and the army will provide another opportunity for women to break the glass ceiling. However, even earlier, women

hailing from different backgrounds and regions in India have overcome huge odds to flourish in the armed forces.

Although the path these women have chosen is tough, they have proved that they have the spirit, the courage and the will to carry on.

Bibliography:

1. <https://thediomat.com/2016/02/indias-military-to-allow-women-in-combat-roles/>
2. Kushi Kalra v. U.O.I., Delhi H.C. dated Jan 5, 18.
3. <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-role-of-women-in-Indian-army>
4. <https://navaljourney.com/indian-army-navy-and-air-force-entries-for-women/>
5. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/role-of-women-in-the-indian-armed-forces-history-essay.php>.
6. <https://www.successcds.net/Career/women-in-armed-forces.html>.
7. <https://www.thebetterindia.com/19759/women-in-indian-navy-sail-off-to-new-frontiers/>
8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Indian_Armed_Forces
9. <http://www.ssbcrack.com/2013/08/women-entries-in-indian-armed-forces.html>
10. <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/interviews/women-in-the-armed-forces/>
11. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/24/indian-armed-forces-to-allow-women-combat-roles>
12. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Big-leap-340-women-officers-get-permanent-commission/articleshow/48302503.cms>



13. <https://www.thebalance.com/overview-of-journalism-careers-in-the-military-2356495>
14. <http://www.olivegreens.co.in/blog/women-in-the-defence-forces>
15. Annie Nagaraja v. UOI (2015) SCC on line Del 11804.
16. Vishaka v. state of Rajasthan (1997) 6SCC 241: 1997 SCC 9Cri) 932.
17. Babita Puniya v. the Secretary & Anr (2010) 168 DLT 115 (DB).
- 18 Charu Khurana v. UOI (2015) 1SCC 192.
19. Vijay Lakshmi v. Punjab University (2003) 8 SCC 440.
20. Angela Sirdar v. Army Board (1999) ECR 1-7403.
21. Rostkar v. Goldberg, 453 US 57 (1981).
22. The Territorial Army Act 1948.
23. The Navy Act 1957.
24. The Air Force Act 1950.