

**INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE INDIAN DEFENSE
SECTOR: POLICY AND PRACTICE**

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Abstract

This study examines the policies and practices aimed at increasing women's representation in the Indian defense sector. Despite recent advancements, women remain underrepresented in the sector, comprising only 3% of total personnel. This research analyzes the challenges and opportunities faced by women in the defense sector, highlighting the need for inclusive policies and practices to promote gender equality and enhance national security.

Key words: India's Defense Sector, women empowerment, National Security, government policies.

Introduction

The status of women in India is not always the same. It has been changing with the passage of time. Their status has seen many ups and downs from the Vedic era to the modern era and their rights have also changed accordingly. Women play an important role in India society from birth to death. Despite showing proficiency in all their roles, women may not be backwards than men in today's modern era, but in some areas they are seen to be slightly behind men. In the past, in a male-dominated society, the ability of women was seen to be less than that of men, but the government introduced many awareness-raising programmes. Social activists working in the social sector also played an important role in this. Despite this, women are always ready to bring themselves at par with men, facing very complex situation. Women have to take care of their lives and also pay attention to their family, society and all other components. While playing all these roles and responsibilities, she also appears to be an honest person also. Kirna Bedi (2022) while stating about the India women mentions that, 'women are not just homemakers, they nation builders.' E. J. Sheba (2021) while studying Roy's novel "The God of Small Things" states Roy's views on India women by stating, 'empowering women is not just a moral imperative, it's an economic one. When women thrive, India thrives.' The views of Kiran Bedi and Arundhati Roy explore significant contribution of women in nation building.

The Indian defense sector, comprising the military, paramilitary, and defense ministries, has traditionally been a male-dominated domain. Despite India's progress in various fields, women's representation in the defense sector remains abysmally low. According to the Ministry of Defense's 2020 report, women constitute a mere 3.3% of the Indian Armed Forces, with a negligible presence in combat roles. This underrepresentation is not only a matter of gender inequality but also a loss of talent and perspective for the defense sector.

In recent years, the Indian government has taken steps to increase women's participation in the defense sector. In 2015, the Indian Air Force (IAF) inducted its first batch of female fighter pilots, marking a significant milestone. Similarly, the Indian Navy has introduced policies to encourage women's recruitment and retention. However, despite these initiatives, women continue to face significant barriers to entry and advancement in the defense sector.

With a view to eliminating gender inequality in the Indian social system and also to boldly challenge social norms, increasing the representation of women in the defense sector has become the need of hour. In the sense that Western country and some South Asian countries have entrusted women with the responsibility of defending the nation, the participation women in India's defense sector is a unique way in slapping on conventional minds. Increasing the participation of Indian women in defense system not only develop their efficiency, but also empowers their levels of achievements and service to nation.

Aim of the Study

This research paper aims to explore the policies and practices that can increase women's representation in the Indian defense sector. It examines the current state of women's participation in the defense sector, and attempts to identify the challenges and barriers to entry and advancement. This research paper also analyzes the policies and initiatives that have been implemented to promote women's participation.

Methodology

In the present research study, emphasis has been laid on descriptive and analytical study. Under secondary sources, data has been collected for the selected topic by studying the works, reports and views from various published resources in India and diaries, newspapers, magazines and books. Along with this, by doing a detailed study of the autobiographies of women, various facts and figures have been compiled regarding ambitious steps of women in India's defense sector. Therefore, the study done through the techniques of these sources is practical and analytical, which is helpful in establishing scientific validity in research work as well as making the research realistic.

Women in Defense Sector

The Indian defense sector, a traditionally male-dominated domain, has witnessed a gradual shift in recent years with the increasing participation of women in various roles (Sharma, S. 2019). Despite the progress made, women continue to be underrepresented in the defense sector, constituting a mere 3.3% of the Indian Armed Forces, with a negligible presence in combat roles (Ministry of Defense, 2020). The Indian government has taken steps to address this imbalance, introducing policies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's participation in the defense sector. For instance, the Indian Air Force inducted its first batch of female fighter pilots in 2015, marking a significant milestone; the first batch of women fighter pilots was inducted in the year 2015 comprising three cadets namely Bhawna Kanth, Avani Chaturvedi, and Mohana Singh and created the history in India. (The Hindu, 2015). Though this was the early way of women in this field but the conventional and short mildness of

Indian thoughts appeared when women were not permitted into Indian Military Academy, (IMA), the Indian Naval Academy (INA), and the Air Force Academy (AFA) neither through the NDA nor through the CDS, but the Supreme Court in August 2023 gave the nod to allow women into armed forces. Similarly, the Indian Navy has introduced policies to encourage women's recruitment and retention, such as the "Women's Naval Association" which provides support and mentorship to women sailors (Indian Navy, 2019). However, despite these efforts, women continue to face significant barriers to entry and advancement in the defense sector, including societal stereotypes, cultural norms, and institutional biases (Singh, 2019).

Increase in Different Defense Sectors

The Indian defense sector's efforts to increase women's participation have yielded positive results, with the number of women in the Indian Armed Forces rising from 6,807 in 2014 to 9,118 in 2020 (Ministry of Defense, 2020). As of December 2022, women made up 3.97% of officers in the Indian Army, 6% of officers in the Indian Navy, and 13.69% of officers in the Indian Air Force.¹ The number of women in the Indian Armed Forces has been steadily increasing, with 9,118 women serving as of 2022.

Total Women in Indian Army: Over 7,093 women personnel are serving in the Indian Army, including 6,993 officers and 100 Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs)/Other Ranks (OR).

Women Officers in Indian Air Force: As of March 1, 2023, there are 1,636 women officers in the Indian Air Force, excluding Medical and Dental branches.

Women Officers in Indian Navy: As of March 9, 2023, there are 748 women officers in the Indian Navy, including Medical and Dental officers. (Meera, 2024)

Percentage of Women in Armed Forces: The percentage of women in the Indian Army is 0.56%, while in the Indian Air Force it's 1.08%, and in the Indian Navy, it's 6.5%.

“The National Defence Academy (NDA) has made significant strides in increasing women's participation, with 57 women cadets inducted as of 2023, hailing from various states across India.¹ Notably, Haryana topped the list with 19 women cadets, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 12. The NDA has been increasing the number of vacancies for women cadets, with 19 women cadets joining in July 2022, January 2023, and July 2023, respectively. This milestone marks a significant step towards gender equality in the Indian Armed Forces” (NDA, 2023)

Indian Government Policies

Empowerment of women is a burning issue all over the world especially in developing countries including India. Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution of India guarantee equality and equal protection of law to men and women and prohibit gender discrimination. The directive Principles of State Policy contained in Article 39 of the Constitution also directs state to direct its policies towards providing adequate means of livelihood to men and women equally and to ensure equal opportunities.

Army

The philosophy of combat employment of women in the armed forces is a constantly evolving process and is regularly reviewed by the Indian Army. Currently, women are being recruited in ten branches of the Indian Army, namely the Corps of Engineers, Corps of Signals, Army Air Defence, Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps, Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers, Army Aviation Corps, Intelligence Corps, etc. Women are admitted as doctors and military nurses in the Judge Advocate General branch and the Army Education Corps as well as the Armed Forces Medical Services. New avenues such as granting permanent commission to women officers in SSC, inclusion of women cadets in NDA, recruitment of women as Provost JCO/OR are being explored.

The Indian Army has made significant strides in integrating women into combat roles, marking a substantial shift in its stance on gender roles in the military. As of 2023, 108 women officers from the 1992 to 2006 batch have been cleared to lead troops in various arms and services, including engineers, signals, and army air defense. This development comes after the Indian Army announced in 2019 that women would be eligible for recruitment into combat roles, including positions in the Corps of Military Police and select infantry units. The Indian government has also taken steps to promote gender equality in the military, with the Supreme Court directing the government to grant permanent commissions to women officers in non-combat roles in 2020.

Navy

Recruitment of women as officers in the Indian Navy began in 1991. Since then, the Indian Navy has gradually opened up all branches to women officers, including recruitment through NDA. In addition, women are being recruited for the first time for the post of sailors under the Agneepath scheme from 2022 and 20% of the vacancies are reserved for women.

Conclusion

The contribution of women in the development of India society, in nation building and in the protection of the nation itself is invaluable. They fought against social evils in the past and brought about revolutionary changes in the field of education, health, and social justice and made their place in the society through political participation. Even in the field of defense where it seems difficult for them, women are playing important role in nation's defense. This is possible due to their self-interpretation, abilities and well through the motivations given by the government and its policies by adapting the principle of gender equity.

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