

## Role of Women in the Armed Forces

### Introduction

The armed forces are a symbol of a nation's security, sovereignty, and pride. For a long time, this field was dominated by men. But now, women have made their mark here too and created history. Today, they are not limited to just supporting roles — they are also taking on important responsibilities in combat, strategic operations, technical missions, and high leadership positions. This change shows not only the progress of women empowerment but also the need for diversity and efficiency in the defense forces.

### Historical Background

In India, women were first allowed to join the armed forces in 1992 under the Short Service Commission. Later, in 2016, the Indian Air Force allowed three women to fly combat aircraft for the first time — Avani Chaturvedi (Madhya Pradesh), Bhavna Kanth (Bihar), and Mohna Singh (Rajasthan). These women made history and became an inspiration for future generations.

Today, women are working in all three forces — Army, Navy, and Air Force — and are serving in high-ranking positions too. In 2020, the Supreme Court gave women equal rights by allowing them to get a Permanent Commission. Earlier, they could only serve for 14 years under the Short Service Commission. Now, with the Permanent Commission, they can reach the rank of Colonel and above. In 2023, the Indian Navy deployed women officers on warships for the first time. Now, they also play an important role in protecting the country's sea borders. Women are also included in the Agnipath scheme, allowing them to serve in the military for four years and contribute to national service.

### Women in Paramilitary Forces

In addition to the armed forces, women are also making their mark in India's paramilitary forces. BSF, CISF, CRPF, ITBP, and SSB have all opened up opportunities for women to serve in various roles.

Women in the BSF are involved in border guarding, intelligence gathering, and anti-smuggling operations. The CISF deploys women to provide security at airports, metro stations, and other critical installations. The CRPF has women in combat roles, handling law and order situations, and undertaking counter-insurgency operations. The ITBP has women serving in high-altitude areas along the India-China border. The SSB, tasked with guarding the India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders, also has a significant presence of women personnel. The inclusion of women in these paramilitary forces has not only enhanced operational capabilities but also improved relations with local communities, especially women and children.

### International Perspective

Countries like the United States, Israel, France, and Canada have already included women in full combat roles. In Israel, military service is compulsory for women. The US opened all combat roles to women in 2013. Indian women soldiers have also played a special role in United Nations peacekeeping missions, helping build trust with local people.

### Major Challenges

The journey of women in the military has not been easy. Social biases and gender discrimination are still major obstacles. People often doubt women's abilities. It is also hard for women to balance between family life and military service. Lack of proper military infrastructure for women also limits their contribution. Some important challenges include unequal physical fitness standards, sexual harassment cases, and being kept away from decision-making roles. According to a 2023 report, women make up only about 0.56% of the total armed forces, which shows that there is still a long way to go.

### Future Possibilities

In the future, the role of women in the military can grow even more. The nature of war is changing — now, areas like cyber warfare, drone operations, and artificial intelligence-based surveillance are becoming more important than physical strength. Women can naturally excel in these areas due to their technical skills.

If the government introduces flexible service rules, women-focused training, better infrastructure, and mentorship programs, more women can make a lasting career in the armed forces. The Defense Ministry's recent step to consider a "Defense Gender Inclusion Policy" is a positive move in this direction.

**Conclusion**

Women in the armed forces have shown great bravery, leadership, and skill. Their contribution reflects both India's social development and military strength. If we want a strong and balanced military force, equal participation of women is necessary. For this, we need changes in policies, society, and institutional mindset. Women are not only capable of protecting the borders but are also ready to lead in defense policy, research, strategy, and international cooperation.

