

Women in Combat Units: Dilemma of The Armed Forces



Major Gurdeep Singh Samra (Retd.)

This is a subject that needs thorough research and understanding of the ground reality before implementing any policy that is approved by the Government, consideration of the role of Armies is very important to arrive at a workable solution so that there is no regret at a later stage.

There is a saying in the east, wars are fought over ZAR(Power), Zoru(Women) and Zameen(Land). There may not be the women factor not at play but certainly power and land are hot reasons for wars; the powers in west have realised the value of futile wars after fighting 2 world wars, the borders between countries in west got dismantled when this realization dawned on the western democracies.

Though, anything is possible in a fluid world politics but probably, enemy of the west is in middle east or Asia or Russia.

Parameters of close combat or hand to hand battles

It is fine to deploy women in controlling gun positions, use of air crafts as eyeball contact with the enemy is only an accidental opportunity, they are capable of handling weapon systems and may prove very good in such deployment but hand to hand battle is an entirely different ball game.

Infantry is called the queen of battle due to 2 reason, it has to mop up the conquered land for remnants of the enemy, it has to physically evict the enemy by launching an attack on a defensive position that could be hilly, deserts, jungles and requires extreme physical fitness and stamina to match, it is certainly not that women can't do that but they are not as fit as the men are in this activity.

Women have menstruation issues every month and they are not in pink health during those days and Army operations are conducted by making best of the fleeting moments of battle scenarios.

Moreover, women in close combat may become easy targets of an enemy who has no respect for any Geneva convention, for example one can hardly expect any mercy

from ISIS operatives who have no respect for women; the visuals from war ravaged Iraq and Syria are reminder of the barbarism displayed by the cadres of ISIS. British Army soldiers captured during Burma operations suffered at the hands of barbaric Japanese who could go to any length on their captured prisoners of war.

North Korean women were made comfort women by the Royal Japanese Army to fill the lust of its soldiers, women just can't be allowed to be used like this and it may become a national shame and soft bargaining chip, post war period.



Reviewer Speaks

Major Gurdeep Singh Samra (retired) has brought up an issue which has beleaguered many nations, though history is replete with example of Women in Combat role, be it the half-sister of Alexander the Great of Macedonia or Joan of Arc of France or our brave Rani of Jhansi.

In recent times, the Red Army's women sniper unit struck terror in the hearts of the Germans during their seize of Stalingrad during World War 2. In the armies of US and its allies, women have fought in Gulf Wars and in Afghanistan. In the Korean War, many North Korean women were in combat roles. In the Israeli Defence Forces, many a young women soldiers have laid down their lives, in combat.

The above examples were to amplify that there is numerous precedence of women in combat, notwithstanding their physiological conditions or the risk of personal danger of dishonour in the hands of the enemy.

In 1985, Norway lifted restrictions on women serving in submarines. In other Scandinavian nations, Germany, UK, France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, women are allowed to, participate in all roles in Ground Close Combat. In 2016, US opened all roles in its Armed Forces to women including in Rangers, Navy Seal and Marine Corps.

Prior to 1992, women entry in Armed Forces was restricted to medical branch in India. In 1992, women entry commenced in Armed Forces in all fields less Ground Close Combat. In modern warfare, Ground Close Combat lines are superfluous as vertical insertion of forces and fluid changing lines of battle have often put the women serving in Armed Forces directly in the harm's way and it fills one with pride to state that on each occasion, they accredited themselves like Jhansi Ki Rani, with a cool head, stout resolve and quick thinking, all of which are hall marks of a good soldier and a leader. This has often been witnessed in Line of Control with Pakistan and in Insurgency prone areas. However, as of 2020, combat roles still elude the women soldiers in India, more so because of India society still being mainly rural and patriarchal.

But the writing is there on the wall and soon the last male bastion in the Indian Armed Forces will be soon stormed by the women soldiers and officers, as society our modernises and more and more women join the national workforce and the old, archaic institution of patriarchy crumbles in front of this societal revolution.

However, the concerns flagged by the writer remain and will persist in all civilised societies which respect women and this debate will time again spring up as to whether it is correct for women to be in all forms of combat roles.

It will be then for the women to put their foot down and to demand their rightful place, in defence of the motherland.

Col. RNG Dastidar, Freelance Journalist