

Women in Indian Armed Forces

The Supreme Court of India in February 17 2020, upheld the right of serving Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers to be granted Permanent Commissions (PC) just like their male colleagues. This judgment was based on the case filed by 17 SSC officers who were denied a permanent commission despite serving for 14 years.

Although women in the Indian Armed Forces have been accepted in auxiliary services since the early days of its existence, the issue of including them in combat roles or granting them permanent commissions has been ongoing for a long time.

This article will further elaborate upon the role of women in the Indian Armed forces within the context of the Civil Services Examination.

History of women in Indian Armed Forces

Before we examine the factors regarding the role of women in the Indian Armed forces, it is advisable to know the history behind the issue.

With the formation of the “Indian Military Nursing Service” in 1888, the role of women in the Indian Armed Forces began to take shape. The nurses of the Indian Army served with distinction in World War I. The role of women in the Indian Armed Forces was further expanded with the formation of the Women’s Auxiliary Corps, which allowed them to serve in primarily non-combatant roles like communications, accounting, administration etc.

One member of the corps, Noor Inayat Khan served with distinction as a spy, acquiring a legendary status for her service during World War II. Although the British Indian Army was limited to women towards what were mainly non-combatant roles, it was not the case with the Azad Hind Fauj founded by Subash Chandra Bose. There was a women’s regiment named the Rani of Jhansi Regiment which saw active combat when it fought along the Imperial Japanese Army in Burma

Current Role of Women in Indian Armed Forces

The Army Act, 1950 made women ineligible for regular commissions with certain exceptions specified by the central government. It was on 1 November 1958 when the Army Medical Corps became the first Indian Army unit to award regular commissions to women. After that, throughout the 80s and 90s, women were made eligible for short service commission in the Indian Army.

By 2020 women are not eligible for service as combat troops in specialist forces such as the Parachute Regiment but they can join some of its non-combat wings like the signal corps, engineers etc

The following table lists Indian Army Corps that have granted permanent commission to women

Induction of Women In the Indian Army Corps

Army Aviation Corps	2020
Army Service Corps	2020
Corps of Army Defence	2020
Corps of Military Police	2020
Corps of Engineers	2020
Intelligence Corps	2020
Territorial Army	2018
Regiments (Artillery)	1992 (Non combatant roles)
Army Ordnance Corps	1992
Army Postal Service Corps	1992
Army Education Corps	1992
Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers	1992
Judge Advocate General's Department	1992
Army Dental Corps	1888
Military Nursing Service	1888

Why are women not allowed in combat roles or granted permission in the Indian Armed Forces?

There were several arguments put forth by opponents of including women for PC or combat roles in the Indian Armed Forces.

Some are as follows:

- Indian society is patriarchal in its mindset and hence not ready to see women in active combat roles.
- It was argued that as many of the male servicemen are from rural backgrounds, they might have trouble accepting orders from female officers.
- There has always been notions that men make better soldiers due to their perceived aggression and physical prowess.

Significance of the Supreme Court Ruling

The February ruling of the Supreme Court was regarding Short Service Commission officers being granted Permanent Service in the Indian Armed Forces. First let's understand the difference between Short Service Commission Officer and a Permanent Commissioned Officer

An SSC is an officer whose career in the Indian Armed Forces is limited to usually 14 years while a PC can serve till they retire. At the end of the 10th year for the SSC, three options will become available:

- Elect for a Permanent Commission
- Resign from service
- Opt for resignation.

It was on this basis that the Supreme Court had passed a ruling that enabled women to serve as PC officers in the Indian Armed Forces. The significance of this ruling opens select branches of the Indian Armed Forces to women officers.

The only exceptions are a combat role in the Indian Army and specialist brigades such as the Parachute and Artillery regiments although non-combatant roles are still open to women.

The percentage of serving women personnel for the following branches of the Indian armed forces are given below:

- Indian Air Force: 13.09%
- Indian Navy: 6%
- Indian Army 3.80%

(The figures are for the year 2018.)

(Source: Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Indian_Armed_Forces)

As of 2020, three officers have been granted the rank of three star general or above, all of whom are from the Medical Services.