

## **6. ON GROUND CONCERNS**

As women strive to achieve equality with men and parity in employment, the military is one of the professions that has resisted opening all its doors to them. Many men considered it inappropriate for women to be placed in danger, regarding it as the responsibility of men to defend and protect women and children. This instinct may have deep psychological roots. Justice however does require that women, if they wish, have parity with men in all spheres. Women have proved their courage, ability and endurance under the harshest conditions, including combat situations.

Women in all militaries are confronted with social, behavioral and psychological problems at all levels. According to many surveys carried out women are not fully satisfied with the ethos of military profession. Some of the major issues concerning women in the Indian Army are discussed below in the succeeding paragraphs.

### **6.1 Storming Another Bastion**

There has been a long-standing demand of the permanent induction of women in the Army. The 'glass ceiling', is soon to be cracked. The 'glass ceiling' has been defined as 'a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy,' Women encounter barriers on the way to occupational mobility. Such barriers serve to create and maintain a glass ceiling that restricts women's career advancement and satisfaction. Many have stated that the 'last bastion' of patriarchal system in India will soon be conquered by the Indian women. The Indian army is really at the crossroads, where a new era will soon begin. However, the matter should be taken seriously as it should be remembered that the most important aim of the army is to defend the country. The security of the country cannot be put at stake at any cost. The operational efficiency of the military should be the only criterion for induction.

## **6.2 Military and Civil**

Equality and opportunity are noble ideals but they have no place in the battlefield where it is a question of living and dying. This was succinctly summed up by American Marine Corps General Robert Barrow in a Senate hearing, "... It is not about women's rights, equal opportunity, and career assignments for enhancement purposes for selection to higher work. It is about combat effectiveness, combat readiness, and so we are talking National Security".

## **6.3 Nature of Working Environment**

Since the Army has only seen the presence of men, gentlemen officers have an attitude problem which prevents them from accepting ladies among them as co officers and this is bound to aggravate if these ladies compete with gentlemen officers for promotions as well. However the fact that the gentlemen officers have the choice of a Permanent Commission gives them a professional security. Although they perceive the lady officers as a short-term threat now, it will aggravate once this threat becomes a long-term threat. Further, the socio – cultural pattern of patriarchal domination prevents the gentlemen officers from accepting lady officers as social equals. Traits that are chauvinistically associated by men for women in society are piled upon the lady officers as well. Whereas for those lady officers to whom a career in the Army is what they want to do in life; the sense of job insecurity is like a Damocles Sword hanging over their heads. Many don't know exactly what they will do after having served in a career which is high commitment and high risk one and gives them prestige, status and perks that would no longer be there once they leave the service.

Further during the service years of a gentlemen officer in the army, be it supporting arm or combat arm, he is on a whirlwind tour of the country to include the inhospitable high altitude terrain of the North, the dry sultry sand dunes of the deserts in the West, the rain and leech infested jungles of the Northeast and long tenures of deployment on the International Border or the Line of Control without even the basic necessities of life. Under such conditions when the lady officers are also expected to stand by the side of their male counterparts

notwithstanding the occupational hazards draws out certain physical and physiological issues involved with their behaviour.

## **6.4 Major Issues of Concern**

The major issues of concern are:

- (a) Physical and physiological issues
- (b) Legal Issues
- (c) Unit Cohesion and Military Effectiveness
- (d) Functional Issues
- (e) Tactical Concerns
- (f) Sociological issues
- (g) Cultural Issues
- (h) Administrative issues

### **6.4.1 Physical and Physiological Issues**

Women if granted Permanent Commission may be called upon to serve in combat zone some time or the other, in her career. The most common reason for opposing women in combat is that they largely lack the physical strength to perform effectively in a combat environment. Studies conducted globally have observed that on an average men are 40 percent stronger than women. Contrary to what some seem to believe, technology has not overcome the importance of physical strength in the Army.

The studies reveal that body composition (both physical and anatomic) favors men. Specifically women experience more difficulty in lifting heavy loads, road marching, carrying loads, running and throwing than men do. Women generally require more time to perform these tasks. Additionally they must perform at higher percentage of their physical abilities, leading to earlier fatigue. The reasons are that they have less muscle mass, more fat, which accumulates on buttocks, arms and thighs which lowers the center of gravity offering

more resistance when running. They have less bone mass, wider pelvic structure and lower aerobic capacity than men. Findings have indicated a high risk of injuries to women during Army basic combat training. During training, more percentage of women are injured as compared to men which is related to a lower level of fitness and results in a loss of number of days of training. Incidence of injury is related to greater body weight and body fat and limited leg strength.

However, it has also been proved that some women do possess the physical attributes comparable and in certain cases even better than their male counterparts and are, therefore, suitable to become combat soldiers.

The disruption of a combat unit's esprit de corps is cited as another reason for women to be banned from front-line combat situations. Indeed, many soldiers have stated that they could not trust a woman to perform her duties in a place where trusting their fellow soldier would be critical.

There is a secondary concern that romantic relationships between men and women on the front lines could disrupt a unit's fighting capability and a fear that a high number of women would deliberately become pregnant in order to escape combat duties.

Pregnancy is a major female health issue, which contributes to major attrition among women in the Army. During pregnancy, women's duties are often severely curtailed. This curtailment typically includes: no field duty, limited physical training, limited standing at attention. Many women experience severe premenstrual syndromes. This problem can be potentially dysfunctional for units with many lady officers.

However in an interview during the Gulf War some women soldiers who got pregnant told no one and stuck it out because "they did not want to let their team down". Other women soldiers had their babies and six months later rejoined their units. An argument in favour of women advocates that the average woman is pregnant for a very small portion of her productive life. There are many women who never become pregnant. The data is

inconclusive about pain and discomfort of menstruation. Rather women are more conscious of their health problems than men which explains a higher incidence of routine medical visits by women than men.

#### **6.4.2 Legal Issues**

The Constitutions in most developed countries including India provide for equality in law, rights and opportunities. Most statutes are founded on the needs and requirements of the persons covered by the concerned statute with the aspiration to, 'benefit the maximum number of people with minimum of effect to those not benefited by it.' To enact a law to reserve a place for women in the Army would go against the very grain of the principle of 'Best man/woman for the job' and may put the security of the nation at stake which is a complete 'No compromise'.

#### **6.4.3 Unit Cohesion And Military Effectiveness**

Physical strength notwithstanding, there is another basic concern for opposing women in the rank and file of the Army- that is men treat women differently than they treat other men. This can and usually does have a negative effect on unit cohesion, morale and discipline, all of which are absolutely critical to the success of a military organisation.

The source of this cohesion is a bond among disparate individuals who have nothing in common other than facing death and misery together. Numberless soldiers have died, more or less willingly not for country or honour on religious faith or for any other abstract good, but because they realised that by fleeing their posts and rescuing themselves, they would expose their companions to greater danger. Such loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale. Comrades are loyal to each other spontaneously and without any need for reasons. The presence of women disrupts the process of 'bonding' that underlies unit cohesion. Men may try to protect women at the expense of the overall mission or engage sexual competition, both of which undermine the bond. 'Male bonding' is an abstract thing, yet it is the glue that holds fighting units together and allows them to do the impossible.

Feminist and their allies would argue that male protectiveness and potential for sexual tension and competition are the result of a lack of education and insensitivity to women. This will disappear in due course with greater interaction and progressive training. We have already begun to move towards a paradigm shift in the outlook and accepting women as an integrated part. The Gulf War bears testimony to the cohesiveness between men and women soldiers. There were some 41,000 women deployed in the Gulf war between August 1990 and February 1991 which made up to 7% of all military personnel deployed including reservists. Thirteen women died due to hostile action, 21 were wounded and two spent time as prisoners of war.

#### **6.4.4 Functional Issues**

6.4.4.1 Alleged Lack of Job Satisfaction & Low Acceptance - Women have complained, at times, that they are marginalized and not involved in major decision making. Their minor faults are scrutinized. They have to work twice as hard in order to prove their worth. Some of the women complain that in spite of their technical qualification, they are given routine desk work or task organizing social occasions. Acceptance among the male soldiers is low. Acceptance of women in the Army has not been smooth in any country. Every country has to contend with sceptics who consider it to be a counterproductive programme. They tend to view it as a political gimmick to flaunt sexual equality, or, at best, a necessary liability. Additionally, every country has to mould the attitude of its society at large and male soldiers in particular to enhance acceptability of women in the Army.

6.4.4.2 Alleged Poor Comfort Level- Most women accepted the fact that their presence amongst males tends to make the environment 'formal and stiff'. Mutual comfort level between men and women colleagues is low. Men miss their light hearted banter which is considered essential to release work tensions and promote group cohesion. They consider women to be intruding on their privacy. Male jokes can be sexist in nature, which may make the women colleagues uncomfortable.

6.4.4.3 Lack of Job Satisfaction- Most women feel that their competence is not given due recognition. Seniors tend to be over-indulgent without valuing their views. They are generally marginalised and not involved in any major decision-making. They have to work twice as hard as men to prove their worth despite their technical qualifications. Lack of individual challenge confronts a vast majority of servicewomen who find themselves in 'catch-22' situation of being a non-combatant, and often without responsibility commensurate with rank, position and seniority- the three most acknowledged tools of authority in the armed forces. Since women are assigned only to support branches, the majority of profiles to which women are designated tend to be routine and uninspiring desk jobs. The thrill and adventure associated with a career in the Army remains an unfulfilled aspiration for most. Most women find the Army not matching with their expectations, in terms that their work profiles are not challenging enough. Women who do cite achievements in the armed forces are more as a matter of chance and the right connections rather than systematic opportunities accorded to all women officers in the Army.

6.4.4.4 Doubts about Role Definition- Women, in some cases, were confused about the way they should conduct themselves. If they behave lady-like, their acceptance amongst male colleagues is low. On the other hand, their active participation in casual repartee carries the danger of their losing colleagues' respect, at times. The profession of arms is all about violence and brutality. To kill another human is not moral but soldiers are trained to kill. They tend to acquire a streak of raw ruthlessness and coarseness. This makes the environment highly non-conducive and rough for women. Women, in general, are confused about the way they should conduct themselves.

6.4.4.5 No Kid Glove Treatment- Women who are mentally robust, physically fit and highly motivated resent preferential treatment being meted out to them. They want to be treated at par with their male colleagues so that they get a fair opportunity to prove their worth. They demand same selection criteria, same training standards and same work schedules. They do not want to be treated as weaklings as it offends their sensitivities and self-respect. They take exception to some women seeking kid-glove treatment to escape hardships.

6.4.4.6 Mismatch between Perception and Reality- However, most of the women opting for a career in the Army belong to families where their upbringing has been in a highly sheltered environment. A career in the Army is at the other extreme. They admit having limited knowledge of military life at the time of joining. Subsequently, life in the military comes as a big shock to them. While some adapt to it well, others find the task to be too daunting. Additionally, many women officers are unsure of their identity, especially after marriage to a service officer - they want to be officers and yet be given the deference of service wives. It has been a cause for despair for many.

6.4.4.7 Short Service Commission: A Demoralizing Factor- Presently, the Army offers only a Short Service Commission (SSC) to the women officers, except for the education (AEC) and the law (JAG) Branch. Unlike male officers, who have the option of a Permanent Commission at the time of joining or at the time of completion of their initial term as SSC officers, women officers are not extended the option of a Permanent Commission. At the end of their maximum tenure of 14 years, they have to leave the service. The ceiling on their tenure of service has a serious limiting effect on the career, as they reach a certain dead end in their career while they are in their early or mid-thirties. As long as women officers in the Army are denied the choice of a Permanent Commission, their service in the Army will remain merely a job and never a dedicated career option.

Since the shortage of officers is being experienced only at the junior levels, the Army does not envisage any role for women officers at senior levels in the foreseeable future. This propensity is reflected in all current policies regarding employability and opportunities offered to the women in the Army. With a limited service span and the restrictions placed on their role employability, women have a double disadvantage of a prejudicial policy, which even if they overcome, they do not have the experience necessary to attain higher ranks. Since women are not employed in any mainstream roles they miss out on important rungs on the ladder of experience, which are crucial for a command and therefore have no representation at the decision-making levels.

A limited service tenure has overall critical ramifications for women. In their early thirties, faced with a dead end and unemployment, women officers have little choice but to either resign themselves to their domestic responsibilities or to struggle all over again in a highly competitive environment to re-establish themselves in a new career field. To have no options to continue in the Army after giving the organisation the best years of one's life is a highly stressful experience and often leads to periods of grave depression. Women officers, once they complete their tour of duty, have to cope with a sudden loss of status, occupation and remuneration all in one sweep. At the end of their short service tenure women officers are not eligible for any pensioners' benefits either and so, they lose out on economic gains as well.

6.4.4.8 Dilemma for Commanding Officers - Commanding Officers (COs) have a great role to play in shaping the career of young officers. Therefore, opinion of COs carries heavy weightage since these are formed directly on the basis of ground performance. It becomes their utmost responsibility to ensure safety and security of women officers under their Command which is often difficult, especially during field exercises. Another problem encountered by them is with regard to their efficient employment. Employing them in isolation and during night hours as duty officers and on other such tasks create threat to their safety and dignity. Thus their male counterparts have to undertake added responsibilities, which they silently detest.

Referring to the recent increase in women's service, some COs pointed out that at 14 years of service a lady officer will be second in command of a unit and will officiate as its Commanding Officer at times when the actual incumbent is away on leave/ temporary duty. Initially having been employed on softer appointments, there is an obvious disadvantage to the unit when they grow in rank and service without matching experience.

6.4.4.9 Extra Burden Felt by Male Colleagues - The male fraternity generally recognise the commitment of lady officers. They understand and appreciate the challenges they faced whilst trying to adapt into a male dominated environment. However, it is desired from the women officers to perform their part without much ado. Biased treatment expected and willfully accepted by them is just not warranted. One officer was outspoken enough to state -

"They have joined the military on the plank of equality of sexes but this plank vanishes the day they join the training academy. Thereafter, they again become the weaker sex needing special dispensations." An officer recounted that a lady officer posted to an Ordnance Depot declined to carry out periodic stocktaking of stores lying in isolated sheds unless provided with escort for security. Other officers had to do her job.

In Army there is a concept of field and peace postings. Every officer looks forward to a good peace posting to be with his family and sort out family issues. But a large number of peace postings at junior officers' level are held by the women officers, thereby depriving male officers of their due share. It has become a sore point with many and cause of low morale.

Most soldiers view women's induction as a fall-out of Government policies and generally take it lightly. They are convinced that women can never lead them effectively. Some Junior Commissioned Officers were blunt enough to state – "An officer, who cannot run with us, cannot train with us and cannot exercise with us can barely be expected to lead us".

Notwithstanding the above, and discarding some percentage of exceptions, women in the Army are being treated in a manner befitting their dignity and self-respect, despite the fact that the Indian soldier is drawn from the strata of society where women to date are confined to household chores.

#### **6.4.5 Tactical concerns**

In *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman briefly mentions that female soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces have been officially prohibited from serving in close combat military operations since 1948 (in 2001, subsequent to publication, women began serving in IDF combat units on an experimental basis). The reason for removing female soldiers from the front lines is no reflection on the performance of female soldiers, but that of the male infantrymen after witnessing a woman wounded. The IDF saw a complete loss of control over soldiers who apparently experienced an uncontrollable, protective, instinctual aggression.

Grossman also notes that Islamic militants rarely, if ever, surrender to female soldiers. In modern warfare where intelligence is perhaps more important than enemy casualties, every factor, even making concessions to sexism, reducing combatants' willingness to fight is considered. Similarly, Iraqi and Afghani civilians are often not intimidated by female soldiers.

Melody Kemp mentions that the Australian soldiers have voiced similar concern saying these soldiers "are reluctant to take women on reconnaissance or special operations, as they fear that in the case of combat or discovery, their priority will be to save the women and not to complete the mission. Thus while men might be able to be programmed to kill, it's is not as easy to program men to neglect women." Such issues however are also raised within units where members of the same family are present. It is often the case that brothers, fathers and sons or other close male relatives may serve in close proximity to one another, and as such may feel more compelled to protect each other at the expense of other priorities than would be the case in a unit which did not have immediate relatives serving together.

#### **6.4.6 Sociological Issues**

6.4.6.1 Sexual Harassment The Army should ensure safety to the women officers. The acceptability of the women officers among the male soldiers should improve. Most of the soldiers are from rural areas, where the patriarchal mindset is internalized, since the childhood days. So, it is most necessary for the Army to sensitise them towards the paradigm shift of mindset. Many times, sexual harassment cases are dismissed as 'frivolous' and blame 'over-sensitivity' of the women officers. However, there have been cases where sexual harassment has taken place and punishment has been imposed. In one case, a Colonel had to lose seniority and was stripped of his rank and dignity in 2007. This is one single concern that has defied solution so far - how to ensure safety and protect dignity of women in the Army. Almost all women view this as their major fear. What hurts women most is the attitude of military officials who dismiss complaints as frivolous and due to over-sensitivities of women involved. Even serious accusations of sexual assault are many times treated in a

perfunctory manner. Moreover, many officers tend to adopt an attitude of acquiescence by resorting to 'boys will be boys' apology.

6.4.6.2 Fraternisation Put young men and women together for long stretches in moonlit desert and they'll do what's natural". This was a popular refrain of commanders during the Gulf War when asked about the reason for the high pregnancy rates. Fraternisation can be detrimental to the morale of an organisation. Fraternisation between men and women, who are both members of the same unit in close working and living conditions is but inevitable. This would create sexual tensions within the unit. The problem would be basically caused by the males who are conditioned to treat women as objects of desire than working companions. Another aspect to this is that certain women may 'turn tricks' to gain for themselves, cushy appointments or promotions thus compromising the chain of command and causing resentment amongst colleagues.

6.4.6.3 Rape of Women Prisoners of War A major social issue involves the potential for sexual violation of women who are captured. Opponents of women in the Army have frequently voiced these concerns while proponents say that any prisoner of war, be it male or female, is subject to severe tribulations. Even male prisoners of war are sometimes subject to sexual violation and the women prisoners of war being raped should be considered a form of torture, which all prisoners are liable to be subject to by unscrupulous enemies, contrary to Geneva conventions. Hence undue concern should not be expressed on this account. In fact when the subject was being debated by the popular press an Indian lady wrote in the Hindustan Times "The one and only fear a female soldier can envisage in combat is being taken prisoner.....but that is tragically happening to ordinary women all around us". In fact women are more likely to be raped, physically or sexually assaulted, beaten and/or killed in their own homes at the hands of a loved one than anywhere else or by anyone else in our society. Major Cornum, who was taken as prisoner of war after her Black hawk helicopter crashed during OP Desert Storm, due to ant-aircraft fire, stated that ' being raped by the enemy should be considered an occupational hazard of going to war '.

This point is also countered by the fact that women who are currently in non-combat roles are still exposed to the risk of capture and sexual abuse, yet are not given the weapons or training to adequately defend themselves through combat. Furthermore, it is argued that women who joined the military in combat roles would almost certainly be aware of the risks and accept them. It is also worth remembering that male soldiers are frequently abused by their captors, and this has on numerous occasions included severe psychological and sexual abuse. In general, it can be stated that volunteer soldiers are expected to have accepted the risk of such treatment when enlisting, regardless of gender.

Many also argue that by not incorporating women into combat, we are not tapping into another source of soldiers for military combat operations. These sources claim that we are creating a military that treats our women as second-class citizens and not equals of men. Other sources expound on the extra resources fact, and state that without women, the military would have numerous manpower shortfalls they would not be able to fill.

6.4.6.4 Marriage and Family. Marriage and subsequent arrival of children are major turning points in the careers of service women. In contrast, the men who also experience these very events while in service remain at least professionally unaffected by these occurrences. Other aspects of service life that bother women are enforced separation from their families, traditional inflexibility of working hours, excessive regimentation of social life (particularly the evening functions at the messes which are more treated like a `parade with emphasis on dress, time, ban on children, scant regard to late nights etc) and lack of schooling facilities in field stations. The last all-too-common problem is a different cup of tea for a service woman who, unlike men, cannot just send the spouse away with children to a place where schooling is available.

Women want to strike a balance between their private and public lives – between the lure of fame and glory and a love of home and hearth. In 1970s, women were ‘family oriented’; in the 1990s they became ‘career oriented’; and in the present century they want a balance between both and are confident to efficiently handle both the fronts. Hence child rearing has become less a preoccupation than an improvisation, housework less an obsession than a

chore. They want the environment to change and not them; the environment representing a male, a corporate body, a government institution, or a business house.

Women normally get commissioned at the age of 23 to 25 years. Soon, thereafter, family pressures start building up on them to get married. Many women confess that managing married life with military service is difficult, though marrying a service officer helps. Subsequent pregnancy and motherhood prove very demanding.

#### **6.4.7 Cultural issues**

Cultural issues play a huge part in employment laws and patterns. What is acceptable in one part of the world may be completely unthinkable in another. The rich Indian culture, being fundamentally spiritual in outlook with a value system that is based on the premise that the social environment is indispensable to human evolution, supports the growth of human emotions and the spirit of sacrifice and the sense of responsibility that is so important to the Army. Yet many Indians also hold strong, traditional views on the respective roles of men and women in society that centre on the pre-eminence of men as the hunter-gatherer and the subservience of women for child rearing and domestic duties.

Consideration must also be given to the significant contrast between attitudes in the rural and urban areas of India. In any consideration of human resources full account must also be taken of the fact that against most criteria the rural population of India, and especially women, are significantly disadvantaged. With deep-rooted cultural and spiritual values they are the least progressive in their acceptance or understanding of change of any kind let alone for the role of women in society. Religion can also play a major part in the acceptance, or otherwise, of women as equals let alone superiors, in society generally and especially in the workplace.

Yet this is a massive over-simplification of a hugely complex subject and excludes, for example, marital aspects and the traditional role of mothers in child rearing and providing life-long, family care. There are also regional variations in outlook, a cursory examination reveals, for example, that the population of north east India, particularly the hill tribes, tend

to accept gender equality as a matter of fact but the more conservative populace of the Hindi heartland of India has far more traditional views. For the Army in general the consequence is that jawans from the north-east and southern states are far more likely to accept women as comrades-in arms than troops from other parts of the country.

The majority of female officers in the Indian Army have regularly experienced a reluctance of jawans (and indeed some male officers) to accept their rank or authority. Despite Central and State Government development schemes to ensure the education, health, employment and security of women, especially in rural areas, progress seems painfully slow and the inferior status of women in India, which is established at birth, remains predominant. For the majority of women, inferior educational opportunities, being victims of abuse and crime and the lifelong drudgery of domestic chores, is assured in an environment where the senior male (could be father, husband, brother or son) is the omnipotent head of the family or household. Daily evidence of women falling victim to male chauvinism and being obliged to play a subservient role is clear in the media, on the streets and in the cities, towns and villages of this vast country.

At the same time Indian women have a huge responsibility for the social, cultural, religious, pastoral, nutritional and educational development of their children and they also have wider community responsibilities. It has been said that Indian women are expected to preserve the great heritage of tradition and the almost fossilized social order that works as a deadweight on the process of modernization. Thus the Indian woman finds herself in a peculiar socio-cultural situation and there are many forces working simultaneously on her.

However, with increasing educational opportunities and awareness in the population, the following negative stereotypes for women need to be totally erased from the minds of the population of our country:

- (a) A woman's place is at home.
- (b) The most important and valuable asset of a woman is physical beauty.
- (c) A woman's energies and intellect must be directed to finding the right man

and keeping him.

- (d) A good woman is the traditional housewife, long suffering, pious and submissive: the modern woman who asserts herself and her independence is undesirable. She can never bring happiness to anybody nor find happiness herself.
- (e) The working woman is the undesirable exception who must be brought in to the marriage fold and made to conform to social norms.

The social ethos of India, especially in the urban areas, is undergoing major change partly as the consequence of increased literacy, exposure to film and print media, the information revolution through internet and so on. The woman of today has tremendous exposure to concepts, persons, places and things that have to be put to the test. The Indian life, with its roots in the rural areas, is on the move and the Indian economy is creating many avenues of high gain employment. Long held social and moral values are breaking down under the pressure of a search for a better economic deal and there is an ever upward revision of economic goals and the social status of women, their economic position and cultural norms. Above all, women's participation in the wider society and access to significant decision making positions and career opportunities throughout India, and internationally, is gaining momentum.

As a consequence, so far mainly in urban areas, traditional Indian values which expect women to be subordinate, altruistic and self-sacrificing are being overtaken as Indian women take on new jobs which demand them to be independent, self-confident and assertive. It is evident that this conflict in values and familial roles where at work women are expected to be quick, efficient and self-reliant and assertive, whilst at home they are expected to be passive, submissive and quiet is causing some societal disorientation which will take time to stabilise.

There is also general evidence that women in India often refuse transfers and promotions as they do not wish to move away from their families or jeopardize their traditional position in society. Such socio-cultural factors prove barriers to women's career development and personality growth, and historically males are usually more successful than women as far as career is concerned. Many women deliberately develop internal standards of success that

include doing a job well but care less about external symbols of success in terms of status, pay, levels of responsibility and so on. This is borne out in the performance of Lady Cadets under training at the OTA and in the assessment of serving female Army officers for courses and promotion where they routinely score more highly than their male counterparts when judged against common criteria.

In the Army if a girl is very ambitious, self-reliant and assertive it is assumed that she cannot readily adjust to the traditional role of Indian women and if she is fit for the traditional role she cannot readily succeed in her career. The consequence is that the Army will naturally seek to avoid risk to cherished traditions, values and standards and focus on these emotive issues rather than the imperative of operational effectiveness and equality. It has also been said that the nature of Indian bureaucracy, which is largely civilian in character and has no experience of the unique nature of service in the Armed Forces, views every proposal for change as likely to cause repercussions and, therefore, the safest answer is invariably the maintenance of the status quo.

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that it will be a huge challenge to make progress on this particularly sensitive issue that potentially strikes at the very heart of Indian social structures. But the more women are accepted as individuals, the more egalitarian will be the general climate and the more egalitarian the climate the more likely women will be found participating in all walks of life. Affirmative action can contribute to economic and human development and the success in all walks of life of several thousand Indian women who have had the luck, guts, finance and friends, encouragement and family support to break traditional barriers stands as testament to the potential talent available to the Indian Army which has been described as an institution which prides itself on symbolising the diversity of the country and brings together all castes, religions and geographical regions in a spirit of harmony. It is an organisation in which all references to internal functioning emphasise its role as a melting pot where men from different socio-cultural backgrounds mix together to form a homogenous body and practise religious tolerance which is the living ideal of a united India. The Indian Constitution which proclaims the Right to Equality as the “equal protection

of the laws” declares “The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them” and includes a clause relating to equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.

The effective presence of women in the all India Services, in the fields of engineering, medicine, management and so on, has given impetus to the view that no vocation or profession could be termed unsuitable for women and the Police and Paramilitary organisations of India have set the pace for the wider employment of women in their ranks. For example, the female members of the Mahila Battalions in the CRPF played a key role in IPKF operations in Sri Lanka. In the Police Force more and more women are proving to be an asset at all levels and will play an ever growing role as pressure is brought to better protect women from crime and the National Security Guard (NSG) of India have now recruited their first female members of the Black Cats counter terrorist force.

#### 6.4.8 Administrative Issues

**“It is a pity that women who opt for the Indian Army cannot go into combat, just as yet ... problems like lack of all-female barracks in insurgent areas, no barracks or shelter, in which case officers have to lie down in the open with jawans. I’m sure I can be comfortable doing the same but it requires more than the Lady Cadets comfort of mind. It involves changing a whole social mindset including the Jawan who the lady officer will be commanding. That may take a while.” Lt Rakhi Chauhan, Indian Army.**

In the Armies of the world, the wider employment of women has required a carefully planned and measured approach to adjust cultures and working practices. A key aspect is the provision of accommodation, rest and leisure areas which ensure the safety, security and privacy of male and female soldiers and officers. The consequence is that for reasons of economy of scale, not only unit cohesion and effectiveness, it is prudent at first to group female soldiers in units where appropriate accommodation facilities can be provided. It is not that they require a standard which is in any way different to their male counterparts (indeed

this would be divisive) but mixed gender facilities, are simply practical while integrating women into the Army.

The cost of providing the necessary infrastructure in barracks and field areas need not be prohibitive providing appropriate measures are costed and included in long term (to 5 years and beyond) estates building and routine maintenance plans. The consequence is that even if the integration of women into the Indian Army, on whatever scale, is several years away contingency planning should start now to provide the facilities necessary to cater for both sexes. Additional families accommodation, medical facilities and so on should not be required because women would be counted against overall manning liabilities, and not be additional to unit establishments, although some modification of facilities will be required, to cater for such as health care. Although some recognition appears to be given to the urgent need to modernise Indian Army infrastructure, there is a need for coherent, timely and funded plan to emerge. In order to meet future infrastructure needs and support future personnel policies a holistic approach is required.

Apart from infrastructure, training and capitation (overheads) costs are the other key issues. On the basis that the wider employment of women should generally take place within existing manpower headroom the only cost is that associated with any changes to terms and conditions of service that increase the number of servicemen and women qualifying for pension. Assuming manpower funding in the Indian Army is based on full manning to establishment (and not some lesser figure to account for forecast undermanning, such as 11,000 officers) then, providing manpower ceilings are controlled and maintained such that length of service, whether male or female, is linked directly to the justified operational military imperative and not to providing “jobs for life,” the manpower costs associated with the wider employment of women should be negligible.

It is often argued by opponents of induction of women in the Army, that additional expenditure necessary to create dedicated facilities and infrastructure especially in the field is unjustified and frittering away of scarce resources. The proponents state that such niceties as separate washroom facilities become simply irrelevant in combat situations. Yes there is no

doubt that going in convoys is a practical problem as there are no toilets. But is that not a basic necessity for all?

Infrastructure not only means additional bathrooms, as some would suggest but the complete gamut of inter related facilities like establishment of crèches, separate institutional safe guards for war orphans, family support plans etc. There are many other aspects like issues relating to one-soldier and two-soldier families, single parenthood, childbearing requirements of women etc.

### **6.5 Grievances Put Forward by Women Officers**

The Army suffers from acute gender bias to deny Permanent Commission to women officers who work shoulder to shoulder with male officers to assist and support troops in combat zones. The advocate for Major Seema Singh, a complainant and others made a strong plea for permanent commission status. She stated that the policies for women in the Army not only discriminate her against male officers but also lower her status to that of a jawan / junior commissioned officer, whom she has been leading for 14 years. Women officers work for the Army for 14 years, which is neither pensionable nor gives her any retirement benefits. She is simply thrown out of the organization after 14 years and that too not on the basis of poor performance but due to her gender and left to fend for herself. This is discriminatory in nature. Some of the unfit gentlemen officers are absorbed in services like Ordnance Corps, Service Corps, Corps of Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, Judge Advocate General, Education Corps, Corps of Engineers, Corps of Signals and Intelligence Corps. However, women officers who endure identical job hazards for 14 years are thrown out at the end of 14 years. Women officers and gentlemen officers commissioned into these services are performing similar jobs, undergoing similar professional courses and are being posted to all field and peace postings. There is no separate charter of duties for women officers or Short Service Commissioned male officers and Permanent Commissioned male officers. There are women officers commanding Army supply convoys single-handedly through the most

militancy affected areas and winning laurels for the country abroad during UN peace keeping operations in disturbed African countries. But, they are being denied Permanent Commission.

Career prospects of women are enormously constrained & limited due to a strict and formal combat exclusion policy for women. The formal exclusion of women from the Fighting Arms has a serious limiting effect on the career prospects as the path to command and positions of authority at senior levels is through these specialities. Further, though women are routinely employed in field areas in various support roles, they are not permitted to serve in units in field areas that have any operational commitment or face enemy threat.

The way to power & decision making which includes command of troops with seniority is through tenures in field & combat application. Since women officers have been denied this arena they are not considered to be on equal footing. Lack of field experiences will never let them compete for higher decision making positions & therefore they will not be able to stand tall & at par with their male counterparts.