



SC Strikes Down Army's Gender-Based Quota for JAG Recruitment

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Why in News?

The [Supreme Court \(SC\) of India](#) struck down the Indian Army's policy limiting the appointment of women officers to the **Judge Advocate General (JAG) branch**, rejected the argument that women cannot serve in counter-insurgency or counter-terror forces, and emphasized **gender equality in all combat-support arms**.

Note: The JAG is the legal arm of the Indian Army, advising on military law under the **Army Act, 1950**, and guiding commanders on operational, administrative, and disciplinary matters.

- JAG officers are **commissioned combatants** who can be deployed in combat-support roles during wartime.
- Under Section 12 of the Army Act, 1950, **women are eligible to join JAG**.

What are the SC's Directives on Army JAG Recruitment and Women in Operational Roles?

- **Common Merit List:** The SC struck down the Army's policy **reserving six of nine JAG vacancies for men**, ruling that the Army and the Union Government **cannot limit the number of women officers in the JAG** once they are permitted entry under the **Army Act, 1950** and directed them to prepare a **single merit-based list**, ensuring selection **solely on merit**.
- **Equal Opportunity in Combat-support Roles:** The SC held that excluding women from counterinsurgency or counter-terror roles **lacks legal basis, violates equality**, and stressed that **no nation is secure when half its population is held back**.
- **Proven Operational Capability:** SC highlighted that unlike the Army, other forces **have no bar on women in combat roles**, citing **Captain Ojaswita Shree**, Major Dwipannita Kalita, and Flight Lieutenant Shivangi Singh as examples of women excelling in high-risk duties.
 - SC noted **Major Gopika Bhatti's** convoy command in militant-prone areas and Colonel Anshu Jamwal's [UN Peacekeeping missions](#) in combat zones, questioning the exclusion of such capable officers from deployment in counter-insurgency or counter-terror operations

SC Rulings on Women in the Defence Forces

- **Secretary, Ministry of Defence vs. Babita Puniya (2020):** SC mandated [Permanent Commission \(PC\)](#) for women in the Army in all arms where [Short Service Commission \(SSC\)](#) is available.
 - SC held that women should be allowed to **hold command positions** and declared the

denial of PC based on gender as a violation of Article 14 of the Constitution.

- **Kush Kalra vs. Union of India (2021):** SC ordered the entry of women into the [National Defence Academy \(NDA\)](#), allowing them to train for permanent commissions alongside men.

Nari Shakti in Defence

- Over the past decade, women in India's defence forces have grown from around **3,000 (2014)** to **over 11,000 (2025)**, reflecting a major policy and **mindset shift**.
- The NDA inducted **its first 17 female cadets in 2022**, and since then 126 women have joined across four batches, marking a historic step in integrating women across combat support and operational roles.



What is the Significance of Women in Defence Forces?

- **Enhancing Operational Effectiveness:** Women enhance modern military operations by contributing diverse skills in, intelligence, logistics, and humanitarian missions, improving **situational awareness** and **decision-making in conflict zones**.
- **Strengthening Peace and Security:** Women in defence play a crucial role in protecting vulnerable populations, especially women and children, during conflicts.
 - Gender-diverse forces are more responsive to societal needs, ensuring security strategies are holistic and effective.
- **Social Impact:** Women in senior roles inspire and mentor younger officers, boosting career growth and morale.
 - During Operation Sindoor, **Col. Sofia Qureshi and Wg Cdr. Vyomika Singh** exemplified leadership and professionalism, leaving a significant social impact.
 - Integrating women in defence reflects **societal progress, ensures representation**, upholds Articles 14, 15 and 16, and promotes equality, accountability, and human rights in the armed forces.



WOMEN IN COMMANDING AND COMBAT POSITIONS



Indian Defence Forces have taken remarkable steps to become a true gender-neutral and inclusive force. It has commenced the induction of **women** into all branches.



Highlights

-  **Captain Shiva Chauhan** became the **first woman officer** to get operationally deployed in Kumar Post, Siachen Glacier in January 2024.
-  In December 2023, Captain **Geetika Koul** became the **first woman medical officer** to be deployed at Siachen after completing the training at Siachen Battle School.
-  Captain **Fatima Wasim** became the **first woman medical officer** to be deployed on an operational post on the Siachen Glacier in 2023.
-  **Lt Cdr Prerna Deosthalee** was named as the **first woman officer** to command an Indian Naval Warship.
-  **Gp Capt Shaliza Dhami**, a helicopter pilot became the **first woman** from a flying branch to command a combat unit in the IAF in 2023.



Breaking barriers

- In 2019, 24-year-old Sub-Lieutenant Shivangi became the first woman pilot in the Indian Navy to steer a fixed-wing Dornier maritime reconnaissance aircraft in 2019.
- In 2017, six women officers from the Navy made history by circumnavigating the globe in INSV Tarini.
- Flight Lieutenant Parul Bharadwaj, Flying Officer Aman Nidhi and Flight Lieutenant Hina Jaiswal became the first all-women crew to embark on a battle Inoculation Training Mission.
- Flight Lieutenant Avani Chaturvedi along with fighter pilots Bhawana Kanth and Mohana Singh – first women combat pilots – are inducted into IAF's fighter squadron.



Read more: [Challenges and Way Forward for Women in Indian Armed Forces](#)

Keywords for Mains

- **“Diversity Strengthens Strategy”** : Gender inclusion improves operational effectiveness.
- **“Peace Through Inclusion”**: Women’s role in humanitarian, peacekeeping, and civic operations.
- **“Combat-Ready Equality”**: Women eligible for all combat-support roles.
- **“Merit Over Gender”**: Selection in armed forces based on capability, not sex.

Drishti Mains Question:

Evaluate the role of judicial intervention in ensuring gender parity in national security institutions.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q. What are the continued challenges for Women in India against time and space? **(2019)**

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