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**The Evolution of Women's Roles in Military Forces: A Comparative Study of India and Israel*****Hariom Kochar****Research Scholar, Centre for Kashmir Studies, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dramshala***Abstract**

This paper examines the roles, challenges, and contributions of women in the military of India and Israel, focusing on the evolving integration of women in both armed forces. The study highlights the significant strides made in both countries, such as the Supreme Court 2020 ruling in India granting women permanent commissions and the integration of women into combat roles in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Despite these advancements, the paper identifies persistent gender-based challenges, including societal bias, exclusion from core combat roles, limited leadership opportunities, and difficulties in balancing military service with familial expectations. The comparative analysis of India and Israel reveals common obstacles faced by women in the military while offering recommendations for expanding combat roles, combating gender discrimination, improving infrastructure, and implementing supportive policies for work-life balance. The paper concludes that continued efforts are necessary to create inclusive and equitable military environments for women in both countries.

**Keywords-** Women in the military, gender equality, India, Israel, combat roles, leadership, societal bias, military integration, gender discrimination, permanent commission, work-life balance.

**1. BACKGROUND**

Due to their traditional role in caring for others and housekeeping, women rarely receive recognition as leaders. Despite possessing leadership abilities that are either comparable or superior, women are rarely acknowledged as leaders (Farh, 2020). Due to their masculine characteristics, people perceive men as better leaders (Friedmann and Efrat-Treister, 2023). In male-dominated industries such as the military, women are commonly under-represented in high positions (Wells et al. 2020).

Male stereotypes elevate military leadership and shape performance expectations (Deng et al., 2023a, b). This setting values dominance, power, toughness, fitness, competition, and antagonism. Consequently, the military attracts more conventional thinking. The military is more sexist

and hierarchical because it views women as fewer valuable members who require protection. In male-dominated institutions, such as the military, women are more likely to be sexually harassed, have male superiors, and execute traditional gender roles in administration or medicine (Daphna-Tekoah et al., 2023). Many still think women are unfit for military leadership (Young & Nauta, 2013). They lack physicality and agentic qualities needed to execute tasks, making them ineffective (Deng et al., 2023a, b). These beliefs support patriarchal, macho military norms, according to Deng et al. (2023a, b).

Beliefs that women are unfit may be the cause of their low military involvement. For instance, the average percentage of women in NATO is 13% (NATO, 2020), compared to 16.1% in Canada's military (Government of Canada, 2023), while NATO has an average 13% female rate (NATO, 2020). Additionally, other Western armies contain low women rates. In 2022, women comprised 17.5% of US active-duty military personnel (Department of Defence, 2022). The Australian Defence Force has 20.1% women in 2021–2022, with 16.6% of top positions occupied by women (Australian Government Defence, 2022). Obradovic (2015) projected that women would make up 5.6% of South Korea's active-duty force by 2020. Women comprise 7% of Sweden's professional military officers, per Persson and Sundevall (2019).

In the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), in contrast, women make up 34% of the army's ranks. However, just 14% of high-ranking officers are women (Tharion et al., 2023). Although women work in numerous fields, including combat positions in many nations, their limited numbers pose a problem. Increasing the number of women in the military is essential for promoting the cultural shift, changing perceptions about women's military fit, setting an example for other women, and meeting society's demands for workplace diversity, equity, and inclusivity (Soules et al., 2021).

Women's participation in the military has undergone significant changes over time, as countries like Israel and India have made notable progress in incorporating women into a range of military roles. Although both countries have made significant progress toward military gender equality, challenges persist—especially in leadership and combat roles. India and Israel are interesting case studies in this field, given their distinct military systems, policies, and cultural backgrounds that influence women's participation in their defence sectors. Through significant court rulings, such as the 2020 Supreme Court decision, India has progressively opened up opportunities for women—especially in combat and command roles. Israel's mandatory conscription law, which guarantees women's involvement in the IDF, ensures women's involvement despite gender-based hurdles. This study compares the roles, contributions, and challenges faced by women in the Israeli and Indian forces through an analysis of the institutional, cultural, and legal factors that influence their experiences. By focusing on secondary data, the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of how both countries have incorporated women into their armed forces and the challenges that still need to be addressed to achieve genuine gender equality in military service.

## **1.2. Objectives and Scope of the Study**

The aim of the study with a focus on India and Israel:

- To analyse the evolution of women's roles in the military of India and Israel, focusing on key milestones, legal frameworks, and policy changes that have contributed to their integration into armed forces.
- To compare the challenges and barriers faced by women in the military in both India and Israel, with a particular emphasis on gender-based discrimination, societal perceptions, and access to combat roles and leadership positions.
- To evaluate the contributions of women in various military roles, highlighting their impact on military operations and leadership within both the Indian and Israeli armed forces.
- To propose recommendations for enhancing gender equality in the military, including expanding combat roles, improving infrastructure and facilities, addressing gender discrimination, and supporting work-life balance policies for women

### **1.3. Research Questions**

1. What key milestones, legal frameworks, and policy changes have influenced the integration of women into the armed forces in India and Israel?
2. What are the main challenges and barriers faced by women in the military in India and Israel, particularly in terms of gender-based discrimination, societal perceptions, and access to combat roles or leadership positions?
3. How have women contributed to military operations and leadership roles in both the Indian and Israeli armed forces?
4. What recommendations can be made to enhance gender equality in the military, including the expansion of combat roles, improved infrastructure, and support for work-life balance for women?

### **1.4. Methodology**

Based on published literature, official reports, and surveys, the research methodology for this study primarily relies on secondary sources to analyse the roles and contributions of women in the Indian and Israeli militaries. The study compares the historical evolution, legal systems, and public opinions on women's participation in the armed forces of the two countries. The decisions of the Indian Supreme Court, official reports on military gender policies, and legislative changes in Israel that have impacted women's military position are all significant sources. The study also looks at statistical data on the representation of women in many military vocations, combat positions, and leadership postings in order to recognise trends and estimate the degree of gender integration in the armed services. The study intends to contribute to the broader conversation on gender equality in the services by synthesising this secondary data and conducting a thorough examination of the difficulties, successes, and barriers faced by women in the military.

## **2. HISTORICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT**

### **2.1. Women in the Military: A Global Overview**

The WPS Act ultimately made a commitment to increase the number of women serving in the military after decades of debate. Women have long led, volunteered, and fought their way into war—all the way back to Harriet Tubman during the Civil War—but they weren't formally accepted into the military until the First World War. The US federal law known as the Naval Act of 1916, or the "Big Navy Act," called for significantly expanding the US Navy. It included a provision that opened the ranks of non-commissioned officers to women. They filled in for males who had gone on deployment and were paid the same as their male colleagues; they were known as Yeomen (F). Moskos (2006) estimates that 350,000 women served in the military during WWII, with the majority of those serving in administrative or healthcare roles. The Women's Army Corps (WAC) would no longer be recognised or provided benefits after 1948, despite Congress granting them full authorisation to serve in noncombat roles in 1943. Women were finally allowed to enlist in the military as regular, permanent members in 1948 when President Harry Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act into law. Nevertheless, they could only comprise 2% of each branch's workforce and were still not permitted to occupy significant leadership roles (United Nations, 2021). During World War I, women began enlisting in the military, mostly as a result of the U.S. Navy's massive growth under the Naval Act of 1916, popularly referred to as the "Big Navy Act.". This expansion increased the need for personnel, so women were recruited to fill positions previously held by men in combat. Women volunteered to fill these jobs as men left for the front lines, especially in support and administrative capacities. The military officially acknowledged them as Yeomen (F) and gave them equal pay for the first time. This development marked the start of women's official military duty during times of war and was a significant milestone in their integration into the armed services.

Secretary of Defence George Marshall was an American Army officer and statesman who established the Defence Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) in 1951 to handle issues regarding women's recruiting, retention, and welfare in the military. This committee focused on policy recommendations to DoD since altering the culture and practices around women in the military calls for a constant, long-term dedication. The establishment of the all-volunteer force (AVF) and the repeal of conscription in 1973 eliminated several challenges facing women. In 1976, service academies accepted women, and in 1972, college-campus officer training courses welcomed them. However, despite these advancements, legal and cultural obstacles remained.

In *Rostker v. Goldberg* (1981), the Supreme Court determined that women's limitations in battle allowed them to be rightfully excluded from chosen responsibility (Szayna et al., 2015). Based on the advice of a task force that was in charge of getting more women into the military, the Department of Defence made a decision in 1988 that says, "*Risks of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture are proper criteria for closing noncombat positions or units to women, provided that... such risks are equal to or greater than those experienced by combat units in the same theatre of operations.*" Although this policy sought to differentiate between combat and non-combat responsibilities, Operation Desert Shield/Desert



Storm demonstrated that it was more challenging than anticipated to apply the risk rule in combat situations. The Direct Ground Warfare Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCDAR), which went into effect in 1994 after the Department of Defence abolished the “risk rule,” prohibited women from serving in units lower than the brigade level whose primary mission was direct ground warfare. The rule also established four additional restrictions (Martha, 2011).

Despite their historical male dominance, more women are now serving in the army, air force, navy, and other branches of the military. According to research, by 2023, women would make up 13% of all defence ministers worldwide. In addition, women’s military enrolment increased by 27% between 2016 and 2022. This noteworthy increase demonstrated a greater understanding of women’s potential and their significant contributions to security and peace (United Nations). However, the rate of development stayed quite low. Women make up only 12% of the army, 15% of the air force, 14% of the navy, and 16% of the gendarmerie in 2022; the gender disparity is still very much evident today. In elite leadership positions, they are disproportionately under-represented—roughly 97% of generals and admirals are men (United Nations).

The worldwide lack of women in militaries further complicates UN efforts toward gender balance in its peacekeeping operations. Despite significant troop contributions from many countries, just 9% of the more than 55,000 military personnel now serving are women. According to the study, women are disproportionately assigned to support duties rather than combat ones and frequently do not have access to higher military education (United Nations, 2022). For instance, in 2022, only 3% of Air Force members participating in advanced defence training were women. (United Nations, 2022). Laws or rules in several countries (US, Israel, etc.) also expressly forbid women from participating in combat positions in infantry, armoured units, field artillery, combat air forces, special forces, and submarine stations (Soules, 2021). Women essentially miss out on most command and high leadership responsibilities due to their exclusion from war. The report also emphasises the general issue of sexual abuse and misconduct in the military. Even if many countries have strengthened complaint and accountability processes, these steps are only effective when coupled with rigorous enforcement and real attempts to alter institutional culture.

## **2.2. Women in the Indian Military: Historical Development**

Sarojini Naidu, Captain Laxmi Sehgal, and the Rani of Jhansi are just a few of the notable female leaders and freedom fighters that India has historically produced. Hence the evolution of feminist power in the Indian Armed Forces is unavoidable (Bhatia, 2008). Establishing the Indian Military Nursing Service in 1888 marked a significant turning point in the increasing involvement of women in the Indian Armed Services. Women could serve in non-combat positions, including administration and communications, thanks to the Women’s Auxiliary Corps, and Indian Army nurses carried out vital duties all through World War I (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

During World War II, female spies also demonstrated some degree of success. However, women were only allowed to serve in non-combative

capacities in the British Indian Army after Subhash Chandra Bose founded the Azad Hind Fauj. One of the main obstacles to women's complete military integration was the Army Act of 1950, which prohibited them from being nominated for regular commissions (Dasgupta, 2024). Starting on November 1, 1958, the Medical Corps of the Indian Army developed the custom of routinely sending female soldiers. Women were let to serve in short-service commissions in the 1980s and 1990s. The Indian Army began a five-year commissioning of women into specialist streams such as the Army Education Corps, Corps of Signals, Intelligence Corps, and Corps of Engineers in 1992.

India is one of the few countries actively trying to abolish the gender barrier in this profession, even if women were not let to serve in combat roles for many years (Radhakrishnan, 2011). 2020 saw significant changes as the Supreme Court decided unanimously in favor of gender equality in the Armed Forces by allowing female officers to take top roles (McInnis, 2017). The two-decade conflict ended with this decision requiring gender-neutral terms and conditions for military service. The military has been following the necessary reforms since then, and orders from the Supreme Court have been carried out. The Indian Army commissions women in several branches, including the Army Service Corps, Corps of Engineers, and Corps of Signals, presently. In 1991, the Navy also opened all branches—including frontline ships—to women officers and recently established the Agnipath Scheme, which lets women join sailors' entrances and reserves 20% of slots for them (Bénéï, 2021). The Indian Air Force (IAF) hires female officers from all branches using gender-neutral employment policies and innovative programs such as the NCC Special Entry for flying SSC (Women). Following the bigger trend of letting women serve in combat roles without restrictions, the IAF has also standardized a program originally started in 2015 to enlist female officers into all combat posts (Satish, 2024).

### **2.3. Women in the Israeli Military: Historical Development**

There are three main periods in the history of female combat soldiers in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Women participated in full combat roles during the War of Independence, starting in 1948 (Harel-Shalev, 2021). Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, emphasized the need of women being able to defend the country's security in light of the dire situation it was in. The reform began in 1994, when the High Court of Justice ruled on an appeal from a South African immigrant that some combat roles should be opened to female soldiers (Lubin, 2002). In 1997, a significant turning point occurred when Alice Miller petitioned the Supreme Court.

By the start of 2004, over 450 women were in combat positions. One significant change during this time was the founding of the coed infantry group known as the Caracal Company in 2000, assigned to defend Israel's southern border. The unit consisted of thirty percent men and seventy percent women; female soldiers consented to serve extra months for the same pay as conscripts. In the following years, several mixed-gender military battalions, including the Bardelas Battalion, the Lions of Jordan Battalion, and the Lions of the Valley Battalion, emerged (Izraeli, 2019). Women were also hired to operate as canine trainers and troops in elite

commando formations such as the K9 squad, Oketz. A significant shift brought about by women's changing responsibilities in the IDF is gender integration in combat and elite military positions (Shamir & Ben-Ari, 2018)

### Recent Developments

In the early 2000s, IDF relaxed limitations on women serving in combat jobs in response to Supreme Court decisions and political pressure. Currently in combat status are the following formations: Border Police, Military Police, Combat Engineering, Light Infantry, Artillery, and others, including women. During the Second Lebanon War on 2006, women and men collaborated in the field for the first time since 1948 (Levy, 2013). The first female combat soldier to lose her life in combat during the war was Sgt.-Maj. (res.) Keren Tendler. With the consent of Defence Minister Ehud Barak, who also authorized other significant internal IDF actions, Brig. Gen. Orna Barbivai was elevated to Major General and became director of the IDF Manpower Directorate on May 26, 2011. Barbivai accomplished this, becoming the first female officer to reach the major general rank in the Israel Defence Forces. During the October 2011 IDF Ground Forces Officers Training Course, 27 female combat personnel were promoted to second lieutenant out of 369 male soldiers. Some of the regiments to which the newly appointed female officers belong are Tank, Artillery, and Caracal. Major Oshrat Bacher was given the title of Brigade Commander in a Combat Intelligence unit and his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel was announced by the IDF in January 2014.

For the first time, a female soldier headed a combat brigade after Major Bacher was promoted. There has been a steady rise in the number of female soldiers since 2012. In 2012, 600 women joined combat battalions, and the following year, 1,365 joined. This tendency is still visible today, as seen by the record-breaking enrollment of nearly 2,700 women in mixed-gender IDF battalions in 2017, up from 2,105 in 2016 (Sasson-Levy, 2011). In January 2018, Israel made aviation history by appointing a female pilot as the leader of a flying squadron. After completing transport pilot school, 35-year-old Major T. was elevated to Lieutenant Colonel.

During World War II, women were also fairly successful spies. The British Indian Army had let women serve in non-combative capacities before Subhash Chandra Bose founded the Azad Hind Fauj. The Army Act of 1950 prohibited nominations to regular commissions, which hindered women's complete integration into the military. In July 2018, the IDF welcomed its first female tank commanders. The four women were not sent inside enemy territory, but they did accompany their tank squadrons on border security missions. In 2021, Sgt Jessica Klempert was hired as the first female machinist on an Israeli Navy missile ship. Within the next two years, the first female leader of an infantry battalion was anticipated. The commander of Caracal Battalion, Lt Col Erez Shabtay, told The Times of Israel, *"I can't tell you the name, but it's going to happen."* *"What I witnessed in this brigade opened my eyes to a very different world,"* he continued. Our female officers and fighters were truly exceptional in terms of their expertise, ingenuity, courage, and bravery (Golan & Golan, 2019). Women's participation in military roles remained controversial. Some Israelis adopted the traditional, and some would argue



sexist, viewpoint, while others contended that women should be protected and that a small nation like Israel could not afford to endanger the lives of future mothers. Another claim was that the IDF had unfairly cut its fitness requirements for women to be eligible for combat units, implying that they were weaker than males. Benny Gantz, the military minister, stated in July 2021 that he was against complete gender inclusion. He continued, "A company of female soldiers will not be present in Golani." "I can't speak about Golani," Shabtay said when asked if he agreed with Gantz. "I am able to discuss my battalion. I was quite certain that women could fight in combat. I could show you a live-fire warfighting exercise with tanks and explosives if you'd like. Female troops were responsible for crawling, attacking, firing, and giving commands. We also faced difficulties with fire tests. Despite being attacked, our men performed admirably. We held ourselves to high standards in every area, including physical fitness and marksmanship. We held ourselves to high standards in every aspect, including physical fitness and marksmanship. Both my men and women soldiers needed to be proficient shooters, hit their targets, handle machine guns properly, respond to incoming fire in the most effective manner, and understand how to function in a desert environment. Shabtay stated.

#### **2.4. Legal and Policy Frameworks in India and Israel**

**India:** Women have served in India's military in a range of non-combat roles, including administrative officials, doctors, and nurses. However, combat roles were typically assigned to men. Still, there have been some significant developments in the inclusion of women in the Indian Armed Forces recently. Women have been let to serve in a range of roles by the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force, particularly in administrative, technical, and medical ones (Ali & Khan, 2023). However, until February 17, 2020, when the Supreme Court of India issued a historic ruling, women were not permitted to hold permanent commissions or command positions in the Army. The Supreme Court's decision paved the way for gender equality in military service by allowing women to hold command positions and receive permanent commissions in the Indian Army, thereby achieving gender-neutral service conditions (Jayaram, 2020). Previously, only qualified women officers were eligible for Short Service Commissions, which limited their tenure and prevented them from acquiring permanent positions. The court's ruling, which mandated the use of gender-neutral terms of service, fundamentally changed military policy. The Army Service Corps, Corps of Signals, and Corps of Engineers, among other branches, now commission women. Furthermore, the integration of women in the Indian Armed Forces continues with new projects, such as the induction of women into the National Defence Academy (NDA), which affords them the same training opportunities as their male colleagues (Amarasinghe, 2023). Since 1991, the Navy has allowed women to occupy officer roles and increasingly serve on frontline ships. Likewise, the Air Force began including women in combat roles in 2015 and finally adopted a permanent policy in line with this (Avadi & Seth, 2020). The Indian military is still working toward giving women more significant roles even if there are still challenges in including women in some traditional combat formations as infantry, artillery, and armoured corps (Revi, 2014). Notwithstanding



these challenges, India's military is steadily reaching gender parity within its ranks, and the national security framework is gradually appreciating women's contributions in many spheres.

**Israel:** Israel is one of the few nations that requires men and women to serve in the military. Since the founding of the state of Israel, women have been critical members of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), handling various duties. Women must serve in the military for two years so that their participation in national security is not only encouraged but also legally mandated (Levy & Michael, 2011). Women accompany men on many military tasks, including combat ones; this compulsory responsibility emphasises Israel's commitment to gender equality in military service. Israel has progressively expanded the roles available to women throughout the years, particularly in groups supporting and in combat itself (Lissak, 2014). Following originally being assigned to administrative or non-combat duties, women began to serve in more specialised roles in the 1990s, including intelligence and border patrol groups. Women began serving in elite combat units like the mixed-gender infantry squad known as the Caracal Battalion by 2000. Israel gradually removed many of the bans on women's military positions, allowing them to operate as tank, artillery, and combat medics (Rein-Sapir & Ben-Ari, 2021). Israel's legal system assures us that women's gender does not preclude them from enlisting in the military. The Israeli Defence Service Law (1986) states that provided they satisfy the necessary physical and professional criteria, women should be permitted to serve in the military in any position, including combat. Although it also permits exemption (mostly on the basis of personal, medical, or religious grounds), the law has significantly altered the military's attitude toward gender integration, ensuring that women are not only permitted but also encouraged to assume significant responsibilities within the armed forces. Israel has seen women in important military roles, including commanders, top officials, and IDF decision-makers, due to this legislative commitment (Peri, 2006). Israel's military has also initiated programs encouraging the development of technical and leadership skills to provide women with opportunities for professional growth (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). Through these programs, women have the opportunity to advance their careers and enhance the operational and strategic capabilities of the IDF. Israel is one of the rare countries where women are actively encouraged to serve in the military as part of their national obligation, reflecting Israel's strong commitment to gender equality in national security.

**Important Similarities:** India and Israel have both made notable progress in integrating women into their military forces, although they have chosen different paths. India has made significant strides toward military gender parity, particularly in light of the 2020 Supreme Court decision. In contrast, Israel has a long-standing tradition of mandatory military service for both men and women, which has naturally resulted in stronger gender integration (Sezgin, 2013). Women have been able to climb to top ranks in Israel's military because of mandatory duty; they have served in combat roles since the 1990s and even in elite formations like the Caracal Battalion. India, on the other hand, has been more methodical, permitting women to hold permanent commissions and

command roles until recently and initially restricting them to non-combatant posts. Policy-wise, both countries have legal structures that support women joining the military forces. Israel's Defence Service Law (1986) permits women to serve in any position for which they are qualified, including combat; Israeli court decisions have consistently upheld women's rights to serve in the military in all capacities. Significant turning moments in India's legal system have included the 2020 Supreme Court decision creating gender-neutral terms of service, allowing women officers to hold command responsibilities and obtain permanent commissions. Israel's military has traditionally been more adaptable and open; India's is now changing to include women in greater roles, especially in combat and command centres. Israel's gender-neutral service policy and past acceptance of women in combat roles offer a more established paradigm; India's military is still seeking to boost the number of women serving even if both nations have achieved considerable progress in fostering gender equality in their armed forces. Table 1 presents the comparison of legal regimes between military women in India and Israel.

*Table 1: Comparison of the legal and policy regimes pertaining to military women in India and Israel*

Aspect	India	Israel
<b>Mandatory Military Service</b>	Military service is <b>voluntary</b> for women. Women serve in non-combat roles, but reforms have recently allowed them into combat and permanent commission roles.	Military service is <b>mandatory</b> for both men and women. Women serve for 2 years, alongside men who serve for 3 years.
<b>Combat Roles</b>	Initially, women were not allowed in combat roles. However, after the 2020 Supreme Court ruling, women can serve in combat roles and hold permanent commissions in the Army, Navy, and Air Force (Abhyankar, 2012).	Women have been serving in combat roles since the 1990s. They are allowed to serve in various combat positions, including elite units like the <b>Caracal Battalion</b> , a mixed-gender infantry unit.
<b>Legal Framework</b>	The <b>Supreme Court's 2020 ruling</b> enforced gender-neutral service conditions and allowed women to serve in command positions and granted them permanent commissions.	The <b>Israeli Defence Service Law (1986)</b> mandates the inclusion of women in all roles, including combat, provided they meet the necessary criteria (Khanna, 2018).
<b>Integration into Combat Units</b>	Women are being inducted into combat units, but there are still some restrictions, particularly in the Army's infantry, artillery, and armored units.	Women are fully integrated into combat units, including infantry, artillery, and tank battalions, with no gender-based restrictions.
<b>Recruitment and Training</b>	Women were initially restricted to non-combat training, but now, they have the same training opportunities as their male counterparts, including in combat.	Women undergo the same training as men, including in combat roles. Israel has special programs to recruit women for frontline positions, including pilots.
<b>Policy Evolution</b>	The Indian military is gradually modernizing with new policies allowing women to engage in combat and command roles. The reform began in real force after	Israel has had a long history of integrating women into military roles, with gender equality deeply embedded in its policies since its

### 3.Roles and Contributions of Women in the Military

#### 3.1. Women's Roles in the Indian Military

Though there are still challenges, women's involvement in India's military has evolved significantly over years. Women in the Indian Armed Forces began working non-combat roles as secretaries and doctors under British colonial control during World War I. After the Women's Auxiliary Corps was established in 1942, their duties expanded to encompass medical services and officer positions (Bhattacharyya, 2012). Women have now

been given the opportunity to serve in the Air Force, Navy, and Indian Army among more prestigious roles. Women can now occupy leadership roles thanks to a historic 2020 Supreme Court ruling allowing women permanent commissions. Though they are members of artillery regiments now, women are still not allowed to serve in infantry and armored formations despite progress. Notwithstanding the ongoing debate on gender and military responsibilities, several women—including former officials Madhiri Kanitkar and Cheryl Dutta—stress that professionalism and skill should be the main criteria for leadership. Despite social barriers and hurdles, women in the military are breaking stereotypes and proving their leadership skills; their efforts are much valued (McInnis, 2017).

### 3.2. Women's Roles in the Israeli Military

Women have been joining the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) since 1948 under rules on mandatory military conscription. Forty percent of conscripts and twenty-25 percent of officers in 2021 are female. Although their initial responsibilities were only supporting ones and not combat, women have always been part of the IDF. Military needs and gender norms evolved throughout time to offer women in aviation, border police, and other male-dominated sectors fresh opportunities. The 1995 Alice Miller ruling by the High Court of Justice marked a significant shift in military gender equality, as it established that women could serve in all ranks, including pilots (Dasgupta, 2014). This ruling encouraged women working in technical fields and in combat. Notwithstanding these developments, gender stereotypes continue to define women's roles, and women's conscription rates remain lower than those of men. But social and legal reforms keep raising women's IDF involvement, thereby promoting equality and security. The Caracal Battalion was the first mixed-gender infantry unit founded in 2004. Since then, women have progressively taken on military roles. In the 1980s, the IDF opened 55% of its posts to women; in 1995, 73%; and in 2012, 86% (Moshe, 2013). IDF statistics reveal that while the total number has doubled since 2005, the number of serving as infantry combat soldiers surged 350% between 2013 and 2017 (IDF Spokesperson, 2009). Figure 1 below shows this.

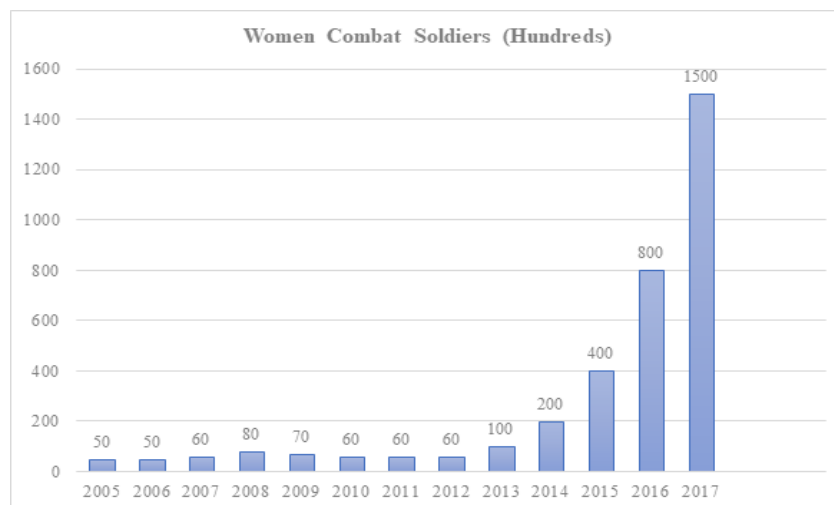


Figure 1: Numbers of women combat soldiers

**Source:** *Women's service in the IDF: Between a 'People's Army' and gender equality.* (2022, March 3). The Israel Democracy Institute. <https://www.idi.org.il/en/press-releases/2022/03/women-s-service-in-the-idf-between-a-peoples-army-and-gender-equality>



/en.idi.org.il/articles/24554

IDF officials also notice a decline in women administrative staff in tandem with the increase of women combat soldiers.

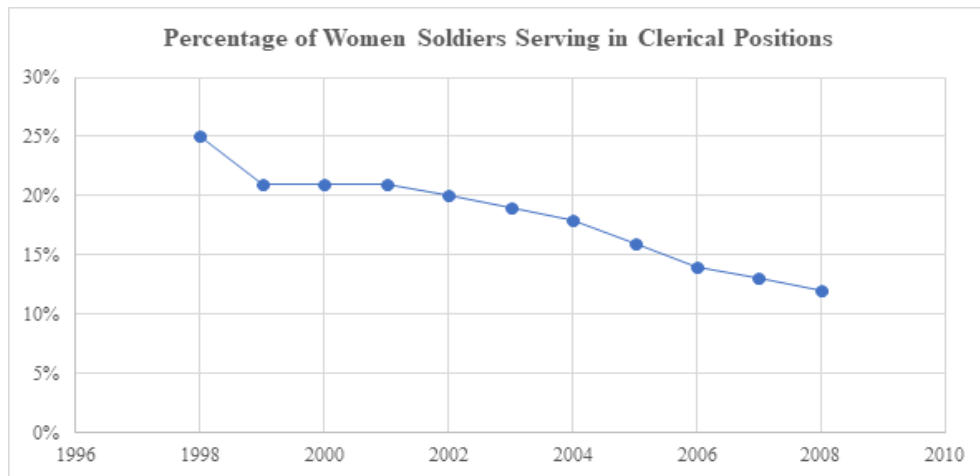


Figure 2: Clerical-position women soldiers' percentage

**Source:** Women's service in the IDF: Between a 'People's Army' and gender equality. (2022, March 3). The Israel Democracy Institute. <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/24554>

Figure 2 present the data of military women for clerical position.

Table 2: Milestones in Women's Service in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF)

Year	Milestone
1949	The Defence Service Law is passed, making army service compulsory for women. Women's service duration is 18 months, compared to 30 months for men. Women can request discharge on religious or conscientious grounds.
1952	Amendments to the Defence Service Law open 25 positions to women and allow them to volunteer for additional positions.
1987	Three permanent restrictions on women's army service (combat roles, positions requiring physical strength, and unsuitable conditions) are abolished.
1995	Alice Miller's petition to the High Court of Justice challenges the ban on women as pilots. The court rules in favour of equal opportunity, invalidating the army's policy.
1998	Sheri Rahat becomes the first woman to graduate from the pilots' course.
2000	Amendment to the Defence Service Law grants women the right to serve in any position unless the nature of the position requires otherwise. Ora Peled becomes the first woman to graduate from the naval officers' course.
2001	The Women's Corps is dissolved.
2004	The first Caracal Battalion, an integrated combat unit, is established.
2007	The Segev Committee report is published, promoting the principle of "the right person in the right place" and stating that no positions should be closed to either gender.
2011	Orna Barbivai becomes the first woman to be promoted to the rank of Major-General, heading the Manpower Directorate.
2014	Or Ben Yehuda is appointed as the first woman company commander in an infantry officers' course.
2016	The title "Chief of Staff's Advisor on Women's Affairs" is changed to "Chief of Staff's Advisor on Gender Affairs."
2017	The Joint Service Ordinance is updated.
2018	A woman is appointed as the commander of a flight squadron for the first time.
2020	The Chief of Staff extends the pilot program integrating women into the armored corps. A committee, led by Major General Yoel Strick, is established to examine the integration of women into combat units, including elite and infantry units.
2020	The Supreme Court allows four women to submit a petition for the IDF to allow female conscripts to serve in elite combat units and mandates the completion of the existing committee's work.

Source: Women's service in the Israel Defence Forces. (2021, June 23)

### 3.3. Comparative Analysis of Women's Roles in India and Israel

*Table 3: Women's roles in the military of India and Israel*

Aspect	India	Israel
<b>Military Service Requirement</b>	Voluntary service for women, except in some specific branches (e.g., Armed Forces Medical Services).	Mandatory conscription for women as part of the IDF's draft law, with exemptions for religious, marital, or pregnancy reasons.
<b>Historical Context</b>	Women served as nurses and in clerical roles during British colonial rule. Women's service expanded gradually over the years.	Women have been part of the IDF since its establishment in 1948, with roles initially restricted to non-combat support.
<b>Combat Roles</b>	Women are currently not allowed in core combat roles like infantry, armored, and mechanized units but serve in artillery and some combat roles.	Women were initially excluded from combat roles but were gradually integrated into these roles, particularly after the 1995 Alice Miller case.
<b>Legislation Supporting Service</b>	Supreme Court ruling in 2020 granted women permanent commission, allowing them to hold command posts.	The Defence Service Law passed in 1949 mandates military service for women and was amended in 2000 to allow women equal rights to serve in any position, unless physically incompatible.
<b>Role in Combat</b>	Women serve in artillery regiments and other support roles in the Army, Navy, and Air Force.	Women serve in combat roles in the Border Police, anti-aircraft units, and integrated combat units like the Caracal Battalion.
<b>Leadership Roles</b>	Women have reached senior officer positions, including Major-General in the Army, Squadron Leader in the Air Force.	Women have reached high-ranking positions such as Major-General and have commanded flight squadrons and combat units.
<b>Cultural Acceptance</b>	Women in India still face societal resistance, particularly in combat roles, despite legal advances.	Women in Israel are more culturally accepted in the military, although gender stereotypes still exist. The role of women in the IDF is seen as part of national duty.
<b>Women's Corps</b>	Women served in a separate corps for a long time before being integrated into regular service.	The Women's Corps was established in 1948 and was dissolved in 2001, with women being integrated into all military branches.
<b>Current Representation</b>	Nearly 7,000 women serve in the Indian Army, and about 1,600 serve in the Air Force. Women are gradually taking	Women make up about 40% of conscripts and 25% of the officer corps. Significant numbers serve in permanent roles, including combat

Women in India's military have progressed impressively recently with the 2020 Supreme Court ruling granting women permanent commissions and key roles (Bhatia, 2008). Still, women are limited from participating in significant military operations, and cultural hostility especially in front-line duties still hinders full gender balance. Israel has a long history of enlisting into the military as mandatory conscription guarantees a great degree of participation. Women have been included into *elite groups, leadership roles, and combat operations in Israel* (Persson & Sundevall, 2019). Though military focus on equality, gender roles still rule even if following revisions and the 1995 Alice Miller decision have expanded women's responsibilities. Israel's military welcomes women and exhorts them to pursue a range of careers.

## 4. Challenges and Barriers Faced by Women

### 4.1. Gender-Based Challenges in the Indian Military

Many gender-based challenges keep Indian women from fully joining in and blending with the military services. Among the biggest challenges are societal prejudice and cultural norms that, especially in combat environments, habitually see women unsuited for the hard and violent nature of military (McInnis, 2017). In the military, where women are sometimes judged as less physically adept than their male counterparts,

this myth affects their acceptance and respect. Although the Indian military has made great strides in admitting women into leadership roles—including permanent commissions in 2020—the ascension to top leadership postings remains limited.

Women still clearly experience gender discrimination, particularly in more higher levels of responsibility (Sasson-Levy & Hartal, 2018). Women also have to balance the responsibilities of military duty with traditional expectations about marriage and family. Inappropriate facilities and lodgings for women aggravate this, sometimes missing on field or rural missions. Women also cannot serve in infantry, armoured, or mechanized units—critical combat roles—which inhibits their capacity to develop in their careers and support vital military goals. Even with improvements, these challenges prevent women from reaching complete gender equality within the Indian army.

#### **4.2. Gender-Based Challenges in the Israeli Military**

Women in Israel still face specific set of gender-based challenges even if they are compelled enrolled and assigned into several military positions. Still among the main challenges are continuous gender stereotypes and social views about women's military roles and generally. Israel has made great progress in allowing women into leadership and combat roles, but in an environment dominated by men women still often have to prove themselves (Abhyankar, 2012). This is especially true in elite roles and fighting units, where women may have to pass more thorough examinations and satisfy more demanding requirements to be approved by their male colleagues. Many women also struggle to balance their military duty with domestic obligations since full-term conscription goes against accepted gender roles around parenting. Moreover, despite their sporadic capacity to meet the required criteria, women in the Israeli military are often refused entry to particular positions because of stated physical restrictions. Some military women assert that sexual harassment and discrimination they come across could lead to hostile surroundings (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). Even with IDF's efforts in institutional and legal reforms addressing these issues, gender disparity and bias remain key challenges for women aspiring for complete equality and respect in the military. Notwithstanding these challenges, women's evolving roles in the IDF continue to underline how the military should forward gender equality and inclusion.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In India and Israel, women's positions in the military have evolved over time, but gender-based barriers still keep women from totally joining and blending into the military. Public opinions, career advancement, access to combat positions, and balancing military responsibilities with family obligations still show challenges even if both countries have made progress in eradicating gender stereotypes, allowing women leadership roles, and boosting their military participation. Women still suffer gender-based discrimination, poor infrastructure, and limited leadership opportunities in both countries, especially in military and high-command positions. Although recent legislative changes—such as granting women permanent commissions—are commendable—gender equality in the Indian military remains a challenge, especially with regard to leadership and combat



roles. Although Israel's mandatory conscription law has let women participate in numerous military roles, considerable challenges still exist, including physical standards, cultural bias, and harassment based on gender. Both countries have to give creating societies hospitable to military women first priority if they want to progress more equality. Among recommendations for additional research are:

Both nations need to include women in infantry, armoured, and special forces combat roles, which are now under-represented. Equal opportunity guarantees will allow all military members to contribute. Early military action needs to tackle gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment. Women must be protected and valued to grow and contribute to the military. To address logistical issues, both countries need to construct separate housing, sanitary facilities, and training centres for women, especially in distant, conflict-torn areas. Managing life/work: Policies that help women balance military and family life are crucial. Child care centres, flexible schedules, and more parental leave are examples. India and Israel might improve their achievements and create more inclusive and fair military institutions where women can serve, lead, and secure national security by addressing these concerns and ideas.

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