Chapter II

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter outlines the status of women in India and measures taken to empower and integrate women; it proceeds to examine issues affecting women at work and women working in non-traditional areas, in particular the Armed Forces. Finally, a brief history of women in combat highlights reasons for induction, and women's participation in the Armed Forces in India. Returning to status of women, the researcher concludes that, women in uniform would serve as role models impacting the status of Indian women in general.

2.1 HISTORY OF WOMEN'S STATUS AND EMPOWERMENT

India fares poorly in terms of indicators measuring the status of women. The sex ratio has shown a steady decline, the number of girls per 1000 boys up to age 6, declined from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. Estimates based on natural gender ratios from other countries indicate that up to 10 million female foetuses may have been aborted in India over the past two decades. In Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, the sex ratio is around 800. The ratio in Delhi is 865 while in the most affluent part it is 845. (Himachal Pradesh, 2006; Missing 10 million, 2006; Sex ratio declines, 2004; Sex ratio declining, 2004; State Literacy higher, 2004; They don't count, 2004). Poverty is not the issue; Adivasis in fact have a positive sex ratio (Desai & Thakkar, 2001, p.177). Amartya
Sen (1990, p.66) wrote in the context of declining sex ratios, “We confront here what is clearly one of the most momentous and neglected, problems facing the world today”.

Another indicator of status of women is health. The bias in medical treatment starts at an early age; at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, 3 out of 60 children treated for acute liver failure were girls, the rest were boys. At All India Institute of Medical Sciences 80% of babies undergoing a kidney transplant were boys (Ghosh, 2004).

Regarding education, literacy rates are rising, however, they are at least 20% higher for males than for females for all years after 1961 (Verma, 2001, p.93). The dropout rate from primary and middle school is at least 10% higher for females than it is for males (Mehta, 2004, p.121). In terms of higher education, when resources are a problem, the male is given preference, cultural biases result in the belief that education is not necessary for a wife and mother (Pruthi, Devi & Pruthi, 2001, pp.77-88). We need more villages like Arley Sheel in Solan where every daughter goes to school (Wadhwa, 2005).

The impact of media on public opinion, thinking and perception cannot be underestimated; hence the portrayal of women in popular serials, movies, videogames, advertisements, fiction, newspapers and, even text books needs to be examined. Apart from scenes that titillate, using violence against women, there are other images being presented, the woman outwardly ‘modern’ in dress and demeanor who fits into traditional roles of mother, wife and daughter-in-law that serve to reinforce stereotypes (P.Bannerjee, 2005).
Violence against women takes many forms. Domestic Violence has been documented by Poonacha & Pande (1999, p.59). The Indian Council for Research on Women has estimated that, one out of four educated middle class men resort to violence against their wives (Rajan, 2004). Dowry demands go up to Rs. 1 crore for IAS and IPS officers (S.Sharma, 2005). Rape is used not always for sexual satisfaction but also as an expression of male hostility, superiority or to control women (Chakravorty, 2001, p.247). During 1990-1996, reported crimes against women rose from 68,317 to 106,723 an increase of 56.2% or annual growth rate of 7.7%. (Kumar, 1998). As Agnes (1992) comments, during the last decade legislation has had little impact, given that attitudes remain anti women. In this scenario of violence it is interesting to note that women are empowering themselves by joining the Armed Forces, Police, and the Central Reserve Police Force thus compensating and assuming positions of power where there was once powerlessness.

Taking a walk through history, in the 19th Century social reform movement worked on issues such as sati, child marriage, polygamy, these were macro studies. In India we were working against oppression of women while in the West, first-wave feminism focused on legal rights such as the right to vote. During the 1930’s and 1940’s, women in India participated in the freedom struggle and the focus shifted to women’s participation in the economic, social and political development of India. During the 1960’s, the focus was on the dual role of women and the shift was made to micro studies which used interviews, questionnaires and participatory observation. This corresponded to second-wave
feminism and women’s movements that peaked in 1960’s–1970’s in the West which touched on every area of women’s experience, family, sexuality and work (Paul, 2004). The UN declared 1975 to be the International Year of Women, the Committee on the Status of Women in India in its report, ‘Toward Equality’ gave an empirical analysis of women’s condition showing that women were discriminated against and exploited from birth. Thus the Sixth, Five Year Plan had a multi pronged strategy for women’s development, and various centres for women’s studies were founded (Forbes, 1998, p. 228).

Four international Conferences, Mexico 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995 have underscored the role of women’s empowerment for development, peace and progress (A.Das, 2001, p.28; Joshi, 2001, p.20). India made five commitments in its Country Report (1995) i.e. to increase investment on education, programmes for mother and child to reach every corner of India, to develop a national policy on women, to set up a Commission for Women’s rights, to institutionalize a national level mechanism to monitor implementation of the Platform for Action developed at Beijing.

In the 21st century Indian research has focused on women and work, inequalities in education, medicine, skewed sex ratios, violence against women, media and sex role stereotyping. While in the West the third wave of feminism has moved away from male bashing to a positive definition of a belief in women’s rights as equal to those of men. Women do not want to BE men, but want the right to authentic choices and opportunities. Kumud Sharma (2005, p.5) in the Presidential address at the eleventh National
Conference on Women's Studies stressed the importance of a genuine effort to change institutions that marginalize women. Hence, it is important to study women in the Armed Forces.

March 8th is International Women's Day, first proposed by German socialist–feminist Clara Eissner Zetkin to commemorate a strike by women workers in an American Garment Factory (John, 2005). Around this time, the Annual Budget in India for 2005-2006 saw a generous budgetary allocation for women (Fair Enough, 2006). These measures are important because women bear a disproportionate burden of poverty. The Government has addressed the feminization of poverty by introducing 40% quotas for women in poverty alleviation programmes such as Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, Indira Awas Yojna (K.Das, 2001, p.139). However, in practice less than 20% of women are beneficiaries of these schemes (Women's Worth, 2004).

There have been changes in policy towards women from the Welfare approach of the 1950s, to the Equity approach during the 1976-85 UN Women's Decade, which saw women as active participants in development. The Antipoverty approach recognized the need to earn an income; the Efficiency approach was interested in harnessing women's labour to make development more efficient. The Empowerment approach of the 1980's was articulated by Third World Women and sought to empower women through greater self-reliance, defining their own agendas, and changing laws. The latest trend is Integration; this recognizes different gender roles and stresses the need for both men and women in decision-making processes. The purpose is to integrate gender awareness and
competence with mainstream development (Mehrotra, 2001, p.237). As Hariharan (2006) points out “it is we-Indian women and men-who must pressurize the state to implement its responsibilities to women, to “mainstream” them”. Dileep Padgaonkar’s message on Women’s Day (2006) was that we must transcend gender; break free of tradition, to do this, rights of women must be upheld in letter and in spirit. Only then will women be at liberty to choose.

2.2 WOMEN AND WORK

2.2.1 Women’s participation in the work force:

Work is an activity that produces goods or services. We often refer to paid work as work but women do a disproportionately large amount of non-paid work for the family and in the home. The 1995 Human Development Report of the United Nation’s Development Programme has estimated that women throughout the world work 13% more hours than men when paid and non-paid work are combined (Women’s Work, 1998).

Census data show that, in India, women’s participation in the work force has increased from 13.9% in 1971 to 25.7% in 2001. Yet, women’s contribution to the economy remains hidden because they work mainly in the unorganized sector with low wage and job security. According to the theory of supply and demand, women are now qualified and available; there is an upsurge in the economy, so a large number of women are recruited. During economic downturns, however, such as recession, few women are employed (McDowell, 1999). Women are the last to be hired and the first to be fired.
Women employed in the organized sector, i.e. public and private sector are 4% of women in employment compared to 10% of men. A study by Confederation of Indian Industry that sampled 149 firms found that women make up only 6% of the work force (R.Banerjee, 2005). The focus of the present research is military women, i.e. professional women in the organized sector; the data cited hereafter would maintain that focus.

2.2.2 Employment Discrimination:

Gender discrimination exists at the hiring level where decisions are based on gender stereotypes, males are more likely to be hired if they are assertive while women fare better using an unemotional rational approach (Buttner & McEnally, 1996). The Confederation of Indian Industry study cited earlier found that 75% of firms did not want women in production, 24% did not want women in sales, and 56% had no sexual harassment policy. Though recruitment of women was on par with that of men, the turnover for women was 7% as compared to 59% for men. Only 45% of women reached junior management, 2% reached senior management, and almost none were at the top. HR departments have a cautious attitude towards women and feel they cannot work long/flexible hours (Roy, 2004).

The Glass Ceiling and The Glass Cliff: Gender bias creates invisible barriers that prevent women employees advancing to top career positions. Haslam found that women who break through the glass ceiling may find themselves on the edge of a glass cliff, where they are given crisis situations to handle but are marginalized once the crisis has
passed (Women in business, 2004). Muthukumar and Pereira (2004) found that women members on the board of the Bombay Stock Exchange 200 companies were just 2%.

Rider (2000) suggests several theories regarding lack of promotion for women. Gender stereotypes lead to the false belief that women put their family first and career second. “The mommy-track”, was a phrase coined to describe how women took less demanding, and more flexible jobs due to family demands. Another theory is that women have less education, training and experience than men. This may be true in some occupations where very few women earn advanced degrees. Women are under represented in science, mathematics, engineering and management while the majority works in banking, IT, media, travel, advertising and market research. The Indian Government has developed schemes to draw back women scientists who have had a career break, into mainstream science activity (Scheme to involve, 2005). Gupta and Mashelkar claim that women’s intuition makes an important contribution to science (Mehta, 2005). Even Nobel Prize winners in science show a ‘gender-skewed picture’ (Bagga, 2005). This is due to women’s environment, socialization and late entry into these fields.

A third theory as to why women are not promoted is gender discrimination. Subrahmanyan (1998, pp.272-273) found Scientific institutions were patriarchal and excluded women from the mainstream. Viswanathan (2003) studied women IITians who constitute 5% of admissions, very few reached the top, and there was strong gender bias in recruitment. Press Institute of India studied 400 journalists and found evidence of bias in assignments, promotions and sexual harassment (Women scribes, 2004). In
universities, Ramchandran (2004) found a patriarchal structure where women were marginalized with little self-image, identity or power base. In Mumbai, however, one third of college principals were women (Being boss, 2005). Doctors are not spared: Garg reported that villagers do not accept women as doctors; they called her "sister" while her male colleagues were called doctor (Ganesan, 2006). It has been an uphill task for women police, women police constables on duty require better toilet and changing facilities (Policewomen face, 2004). Women police have always been given soft jobs, this is slowly changing, in 2004, Borwankar was appointed the first woman chief of the crime branch, Mumbai, and Bhattacharya became the first woman Director General, police, Uttranchal.

Financial Inequities: Across all occupations, age groups, and countries, women employed full time earn less than men for the same work. In the US, women earn 76% of what the men earn, in Canada 70%, in Denmark 83%, in Australia 91%, in Russia 40%, and in Japan 50% (Neft & Levine, 1997). Research shows that women believe they are entitled to less pay than men, one reason may be socialization; women learn to value the personal meaning of work- not pay and promotion- this is reversed for men. Another reason is- women may not have current comparison standards, i.e. knowledge of men’s current salaries (Desmarais & Curtis, 1997). In India, financial inequities abound from daily rates for labour to salaries of IIM graduates. After the Latur earthquake the Government offered the affected population jobs, women’s wages were half that of men. At IIM placements, men are offered the highest pay packages; however this could also reflect the smaller percentage of women in IIMs, approximately 20% of students. In this
context, the Armed Forces would be an attractive proposition to women, since there is no gender bias in pay and benefits. Women and men of the same rank and service get the same pay. The inequality lies in permitting women only in certain branches and giving them short service commissions.

2.2.3 Women in non-traditional occupations:

Glass walls i.e. occupational segregation exists at the work place. Women are over represented in traditional “female” fields of service, sales and clerical work, which have low, pay, low status and less advancement paths, referred to as “pink collar” jobs. Women take up traditional careers because of gender role and occupational stereotyping which starts from pre-school with gender appropriate toys and behaviour to career counseling which encourages women to pursue traditional careers. McDowell (1999) suggests it is not the characteristics of the jobs themselves that demand supposedly masculine or feminine characteristics but, who does a job, depends on how it is socially constructed, valued and rewarded.

Women who have supportive role models, in or outside the home may be influenced to pursue non-traditional careers. Betz (1993) claims that female role models may be the most important determinant of whether women remain in male-dominated professions. Steel and Barling (1996) confirm that mothers have an important influence on their daughter’s occupational choices. When women replace men as the majority, called occupational feminization, it is often found that the status of such an occupation declines.
Non-traditional jobs for women include blue-collar jobs of construction worker, plumber, and electrician as well as white-collar jobs of executives etc. When women are less than 15% of the total group they are referred to as tokens (Kanter, 1997). This makes them highly visible and their minority status may result in harassment, exclusion from informal activities at work and stereotyping. Thus if a woman keeps a box of tissues on her desk, or photographs, it may be called decorating the office. In addition, the male majority workers resist hiring additional females (Ott, 1999). Males may try to maintain male superiority by using harassment, hostility and sexualization of women. Women also face micro iniquities, verbal comments and behaviours that devalue members of a group e.g. not speaking to female workers, not telling them how to improve job performance and qualify for promotions, asking only a male to fill in as supervisor (Rowe, 1990).

Women join non-traditional work because they have the ability and they like the job. P. Ashapilu the only female scooter mechanic in Mumbai, says an office job would not suit her; she earns good money and enjoys her work. S. Yadav one of two women engine drivers on the Central Railway has no time for hobbies and sometimes finds it lonely. Bollywood stuntwoman Suraiya took this non-traditional job after separating from her husband. The last bastion of male exclusivity fell when women joined the armed forces. In 1992 R. Singh, now Lieutenant Commander joined the Navy after topping at law from Chandigarh. For her the Armed Force was a way of life because many in her family were Army officers. She joined the Navy because it was the first to advertise. She emphasizes the need for confidence and excellence at work. N. Chaturvedi, a Lieutenant in the Army grew up at National Defence Academy where her father was posted, joining the Army.
was her ambition. Captain M. Duhaiya joined out of curiosity. She found that soldiers took some time to adjust to a woman officer but accepted her once they realized she could do her job (These women rise, 2005).

2.3 WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES

2.3.1 Need for women in the Indian Armed Forces

Hundiwala (1992) has cited Articles 16(3) and 33 of the Indian Constitution exempting the Armed Forces from Fundamental Rights regarding women's employment. The Army, Navy and Air Force Acts stipulate that women are ineligible for enrollment and their induction requires a special notification. Karve and Debnath (2000) have referred to the undue haste in induction, without a long-term holistic view, while giving the first batch of women disproportionate privileges. Arya (2001) has looked at two causes: Notional (Idealism), fulfillment of equality of employment and Practical (pragmatism), need for young officers until the rank of major. Bakshi (2003) was of the opinion that India with its large population does not face manpower shortages. The following data however will show that the Indian Armed Forces are facing a shortage of skilled, qualified manpower.

The Indian Army is authorized 46,280 officers; it is short by 12,099, the Navy has a shortage of 1,124 and the IAF has a shortage of 429 officers. The Defence Minister P. Mukherjee has attributed this to the risk factor and attractive alternative employment. Recruitment strategies now include seminars, campus interactions and publicity. The vacancies are up to the rank of major i.e. the fighting element (Armed Forces, 2005). The IAF is affected by poaching from private airlines that offer higher salaries. From 2002 to
2004 as many as 263 IAF pilots took “premature retirement”, now it is more difficult to leave (IAF pilots, 2005; Two hundred IAF, 2006).

The Army’s image has changed from an elite institution to a middle class one, an increasing number of entrants belong to modest backgrounds or are sons of army men (Purie, 1998). The quality of candidates is often below average, particularly in science and communication skills (Army guns, 2004). Sachadeva (2005) laments that few join because they like the profession; they join because they cannot make it elsewhere. Not everyone agrees, Brigadier General I. Verma refers to the continuous cycle of study and professional courses pursued by officers today that give them an edge. From 1998 eight years down the line, according to a study conducted by the National Defence Academy (Roy, NDTV News Hour, 2006), the middle class are taking up more lucrative positions, it is the rural population, sons of farmers and school teachers who are joining the Academy. The study found that 47% of National Defence Academy recruits were from families with incomes less than Rs. 10,000/- and 45% from so called ‘backward states’ such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan. The bronze medal this year was awarded to the son of two school teachers from a rural area.

Another concern is the “greying” age profile of operational commanders. The key factor in winning the Kargil war was young officers. In 2004, the army had a shortage of 11,709 officers in the ranks of Lieutenants to Majors. The A.V. Singh Committee report to be implemented over 2005-2006 recommended faster promotions and making the Short Service Commission (SSC) more attractive with pro-rata pension and lateral
transfers to PSU, Railways, Para military (Make Short Service, 2004; Pandit, 2004). The SSC was initially extendable to 10 and now can be extended to 14 years. J. Singh (2004) former director of Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis was of the opinion that such short-term ad hoc measures could not replace long-term stable manpower policies. He felt that the extension to 14 years would negate the very reason for SSC (filling up shortages at junior levels), burden the existing infrastructure of accommodation and medical benefits and such officers would have to look for a second career when their children were still young.

The National Cadet Corps has also instituted measures to improve communication skills and leadership abilities of cadets so they could face the Service Selection Board more confidently. They have a new uniform, combat fatigues, so that cadets develop pride in the uniform and are motivated to join the forces (R.Singh, 2004). At an NCC camp for girls, some of them aspired to join the police and military, however only 5% actually join and NCC enrollment has also declined. (NCC is alive, 2003; NCC girls, 2003).

It is in this scenario that General J.J. Singh has spoken of a 15% increase in women officers i.e. 150 per year. Given the shortage of qualified officers the researcher is of the opinion that women are being inducted not just as an act of gender equality but because they are the right kind of personnel. Twelve women officers interviewed by India Today ranked “discipline” and “organization” as the highest factors in their liking for army life (Marching Proud, 1998).
2.3.2 History of women in combat:

Elshtain (2000 b) has scripted a history of women in war from medieval times until today. Women have been mainly non-combatants but have played many parts in war, those of victims (atrocities), sufferers (wives), provisioners of material supplies and sex (baggage train and camp followers), in some cases they have even donned men’s clothing and fought as men. During World War I, women were given military status, though still as auxiliaries. Approximately 300,000 women served during World War II and 8,000 women were among the forces that invaded Nazi Germany (Janes, 1989). Soviet Women were the only regular female combat forces; in 1943, their peak strength was 8% of their military (Noggle, 1994).

After World War II, women were once again marginalized and a cultural amnesia regarding their contributions was in place. Only in the 1970’s did Armed Forces in Western countries begin to admit women as regular officers not auxiliaries and during peacetime not war. This challenged the male mind set of the military, as former US Joint chiefs of Staff Chairman, J.Vessey observed “the influx of women has brought greater change to the US military than the introduction of nuclear weapons”. In 1981, the US Army began a “Women Pause”, a temporary levelling off, of the rapid increase in the number of women allowed to join so that the Army could review its policies, the effect of women on readiness, and the combat exclusion rule (McCoy, 1995). The largest deployment of women was during the Gulf War when 40,000 American military women were deployed during operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, from 1990 to 1991, during which two women were taken prisoner and 13 to 16 women died.
In India in medieval times women participated on an individual basis and less as a socially accepted occupational choice. S. Singh (2005) has mentioned Razia Sultan who ruled Delhi (1236-1240); Rudramma, Queen of the Kakatiyas of Warangal (1259-1288); Akka Devi, sister of Chalukya King Jaya Sinha11,(1015–1042); Kundabai sister of Chola Rajyaraja 1; Uma Devi, Queen of Hoysala King Virballala II; Nayakuralu, a Telugu woman who fought wearing armour; Rudrammba; Chennama, Queen of Kittur (1778–1829); Chand Bibi who rode with her with her husband Ali Adil Shah; Kurma Devi; Tarabai a Rajput women; Queen Durgavati; Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi during the Mutiny of 1857.

The first organized group of women combatants was the woman’s wing of Subhash Chandra Bose’s Azad Hind Fauj called the Rani Jhansi Brigade, headed by Lakshmi Swaminathan, 1000 women joined and trained at Singapore, Rangoon and Bangkok. The long-term goal was equality for women (Gawankar, 2003). The Ranis proved their courage on the battlefield; two lost their lives and became martyrs. Capt. L. Sehgal has described the INA as the best part of her life (Mukherjee, 2005).

In India today, The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and the Police are two forces that have women bearing arms. The CRPF, a paramilitary organization inducted women in the 1980s to meet challenges posed by socio-political and economic forces. With the break down of the joint family system, unemployment, as well as an increase in women insurgents, terrorists and criminals, women found their place in the CRPF. In 1987, the
Mahila Battalion became operational, its role being to assist State Administration in restoring and preserving law and order; relief, rescue, and any other duty assigned by the CRPF. The commitment level has remained very high though high mobility and other stressors affect the women (S. Singh, 2005, p.69).

Though CRPF women are both at officer and rank level and have been trained in the use of arms, they are usually given support roles in a highly masculine and patriarchal institution. “We send messages, do guard duties and help transport supplies” (S. Singh, 2005, p.97). In terms of promotion 52% of women said “out of question” because they have mainly support roles, only 11% described their chances as excellent. Most had been waiting to complete their 20 years so as to get their pension and leave, due to low morale and frustration. When women were first inducted into the CRPF some men reacted strongly, others encouraged and helped them and as such are still recalled by CRPF women. (S. Singh, 2005, p.100).

Policewomen are also trained in the use of arms, there are a few who have actually shot gangsters, Inspectors Kapile and Narkar and Bade have that distinction, as Kapile said, “It was either him or us”. Bade reported feeling no guilt at killing criminals. However, Narkar found it difficult to discuss and the sight of the blood-drenched bodies still disturbs her. Kapile and Narkar were the best shots at Police Academy and were selected to be part of active service; they were given field departments of crime and narcotics. The earlier batch was given “safe duties” such as frisking at airport etc. (Akthar & Bhatlekar, 1997). On the other hand Khopade, railway police commissioner, Mumbai is reluctant to
post women constables in ladies compartments because “they would not be able to tackle the menace of drug addicts (urchins) and armed men” (S. Sen, 2005).

Though the State Government provides for 30% women in the police force, there are only 4%. Joint Commissioner P.K. Jain said women could not be recruited as constables because they did not meet the physical standards or failed the written test. Women activists say in the Indian culture the girl child is given the least in terms of nutrition and opportunities, police should tell women candidates how to improve and come back, also efforts should be made to get public information to them, such as the army recruitment advertisements (Hafeez & Shrinivasan, 2001). Though, women such as Kiran Bedi, as well as Director General Uttranchal (K.C. Bhattracharya) and Joint Commissioner Crime Mumbai (M. Borwankar) have reached top positions in the Indian Police they are very few in a practically all male club.

2.3.3 Women in the Indian Armed Forces, Current scenario:

Women in India are not inducted at rank level as in the CRPF and Police. A question often asked is Can Women be Soldiers? There are many factors involved. In full combat gear, a soldier carries 27 Kg. including the rifle and ammunition; the army is trying to lighten the burden (Sen & Halarnkar, 1997). Women soldiers if inducted into the infantry will have to carry this load. Recent plans however visualize hi-tech soldiers with ballistic helmets, “smart” vests with miniaturized communication and GPS systems, hand held computers and laser-guided weapons while efforts are on to reduce the load to 20 Kg. (Pandit, 2006, April 18). Women CRPF, Asia’s only armed women combat unit,
carry combat gear weighing 16 Kg. (Aggarwal, 2006). The ultimate ideal would be unmanned warfare with dull and dangerous missions being undertaken by robots (Weiner, 2005). Then the question of men and women would be a moot point.

Another factor is high altitude postings. Dr. Panjwani from Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences, New Delhi, found jawans with sleep problems, breathing problems, impaired cognitive functioning including short term memory and attention problems, as well as higher blood pressure, increased cortisol (a stress hormone) and an increased risk of a heart attack (Sinha, 2005 September 28). Before women are assigned to combat and high altitude, thorough research would be needed on the effects on their health and cognitive functioning.

Further more in India, jawans fight more for the izzat (honour) of their paltan rather than anything else. Introducing women into the ranks would need to be done very cautiously. The army has resisted any changes in its regimental system such as reservations for Scheduled Class and Tribes. If women were recruited at rank level, it would have to be on merit and fitness with no relaxation of standards (Pandit, 2005).

The issue of women in combat is approached with great caution by the Armed Forces. At the Officers Training Academy (OTA) men and women cadets are given a feel of real battle field environment called “Battle Inoculation”, dummy targets being hit by guns, rocket launchers, mortars and grenades. One of the women cadets remarked, “I am thrilled at this experience, it is really fascinating to handle such weapons (Cadets given
feel, 2003). Army officials have maintained, “Due to practical problems, women cannot be allowed to serve in combat forces and be posted to field areas” (Pandit, 2005). With the induction of 16 women into the Corps of Army Air Defence, women are being introduced into the rigours of warfare. Lt. Vidya from a civilian family says the troops have accepted her; she plays volleyball with them and tries to understand their psychology. The CO of the regiment says Vidya is as good as any other officer and there are no gender issues (R.Singh, 2005).

Issues that need to be addressed are training standards that were earlier relaxed for women at OTA causing resentment among men, who felt a number of peace time vacancies were taken from them. With marriages within the service, combined postings are an issue. Even now, the army is only looking at staff appointments in the fighting units (Datta, 2005). The first batch of women army officers retired in 1993. Major Priya Jhingan, Captain Mohan were nostalgic about leaving and insisted that, the Army was the cleanest institution in the country, and an extension would be welcome. To quote Jhingan, “I am not leaving the Army. The Army is leaving me” (Grewal, 2003).

Women in the Indian Air Force are restricted to transport planes. Hooda and Bhangaonkar, who have finished their course at Air Force Academy, Dindigal would love to fly fighters, Simran is happy to serve in whatever capacity (New IAF Women, 2004). Chandi is the first woman pilot to fly a helicopter in Siachen on maintenance missions and evacuation of jawans (women have to volunteer for difficult terrains), her husband is
part of an aerobatic team, and her sister flies choppers. She still dreams of graduating to fighter planes (Laxman, 2004).

These issues will need to be examined as the Armed Forces continue to recruit women. An organization like the Armed Forces cannot stand still, as it continues to grow and adapt to changing situations, the role of women will also evolve. It is important that these changes take place in a planned, manner so that they are welcomed by all.

In conclusion, this chapter has given a background of the status of women in India, their empowerment and integration, as well as their participation in the workforce, particularly in non-traditional areas. An analysis of the reasons for induction of women into the Armed Forces was undertaken. The chapter concludes with a discussion of women in the CRPF and the Police as the only services where women bear arms and are inducted at rank level, this has been linked with the current scenario in the Armed Forces.