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Women Power to The Fore

Armed Forces have opened the floodgates for women to prove their mettle

Army chief Bipin Rawat's decision to open up combat roles to women is an unprecedented move. The Army's announcement is in line with the Indian Air Force's decision last year to induct women into the fighter jet stream. Earlier too, we had seen women's power on display at Republic Day parade in 2015. All such developments mark a shift from discriminatory practices and will essentially make our forces more inclusive and representative of a nation that is gradually doing away with patriarchal mindset. Arguably, there will be many obstacles in way of women actually becoming equals in the Army's combat operations. To this end, the Army Chief has taken the right move to start inducting women into the military police role. This is, perhaps, the best place to begin with for a gradual integration into the combat role. There are, however, niggling issues that have been raised by skeptics who have argued that a few jobs should remain closed for women. Critics appear to be driven by the theory of sexism. The military has, after all, been a male bastion.

Naysayers believe that women are not strong enough to fight, or protect themselves, or others in a war-like situation. They point to biological gender differences in strength and aggression. Apprehensions have also been raised about women being taken as prisoners of war. To be true, such arguments have stood for decades and have been too overarching. It must be kept in mind that Indian women have changed dramatically since the 1980s. Though pre-eminent jobs in the Armed Forces were taken away by nevertheless situations have changed. In recent times, women have not only been a part of the Armed Forces but have also shown a desire to move away from traditional roles that were limited to second-tier jobs such as legal, medical and educational, among others. As of 2015, around 3,300 women were inducted into various wings of the Armed Forces. Not every woman may have the physical strength and stamina to become a jawan or an Air Force fighter pilot, but it holds true for men too. Any doubts about women performing the most grueling task must also be laid to rest as the first lot of female combat aircraft pilots in the Air Force have almost completed their training and are likely to be commissioned as fighter pilots soon.

Most importantly, with this step, India will join the league of other major powers like the US, the UK, Israel, Canada and other European nations where women have defended their country alongside their male counterparts. Undoubtedly, barriers will be many but rather than making this as an excuse, the Army must find ways to train women for combat roles while maintaining same qualifying standards. No exceptions must be made. But then it is also expected that the Army will take all necessary measures to safeguard and prevent them from discrimination. The next in line to break the grass ceiling should be the Navy.

Business Standard

Boeing, Dassault racing for Rs 50,000-cr Navy deal for 57 fighter jets

By Arindam Majumder

Boeing has pitched its FA-18 aircraft, while Dassault is building case for its Rafale jet

American aerospace giant Boeing and France's Dassault Aviation are among the four entities that have responded to the Indian Navy's 'Request for Interest (RFI)' to provide 57 multi-role carrier borne fighters, industry sources said.

The other two are Sweden's SAAB and Rosoboronexport of Russia. While Boeing has pitched its F/A-18 Super Hornet, Dassault has briefed the navy on its Rafale. SAAB has offered the maritime variant of its Gripen single-engine fighter jet. Naval Chief Sunil Lanba confirmed the development. "We will examine the RFI and take it forward," he told this newspaper. The deal is valued over Rs 50,000 crore.

Sources say it is now mainly between Boeing's FA-18 and Dassault's Rafale, as the navy would prefer a twin-engine aircraft against SAAB's single-engine Gripen. "While the navy did not specify a variant, there is a clear preference for a twin-engine model," a senior industry executive said.

As it had earlier done a deal with the Indian Air Force (IAF), Dassault is seen as having an upper hand. The government signed an \$8.7-billion deal with France last year for 36 Rafale warplanes for the IAF. Dassault, defence ministry sources say, has argued it makes sense to equip IAF and navy with the same platform, for better logistics, maintenance and industrial support. "It would help in cost control like manpower training, pilot training, simulators and make it easier to get spare parts," sources said.

All the four companies refused to comment on queries sent to them.

"Dassault with joint venture partner Reliance has a Make in India proposal already in place and envisages all 57 aircraft to be delivered from its facility at Mihaan (near Nagpur)," a company executive said on condition of anonymity.

The navy had on January 25 put out an RFI for the 57 fighter planes, giving manufacturers four months to respond. In the technical evaluation, the foreign companies had to answer queries on technical parameters, budgetary estimates, likely level of indigenisation, transfer of technology and schedule of deliveries after a contract is inked.



Sat, 10 June, 2017

In Valley, Walls Will Be Army's Eyes; Ultras Can't Hide Any More

The Army plans to acquire hand-held radars to detect terrorists hiding in houses in Jammu & Kashmir to avoid casualties and collateral damage during "operations".

At least two "through the wall" radars will be inducted shortly. Forty more such devices will be deployed in all the anti-insurgency grids.

Mounted on tripods these radars can detect movements or images behind the wall from a range of 50 to 70 metres and cost Rs 60 lakh each. The radars will come from Israel and the US, and the Army will procure them through the Army commanders discretionary fund, officials said on Friday.

These sophisticated radars can also capture silhouette of a human body apart from detecting body heat or breath via electromagnetic rays. They will come handy for the security forces in ferreting out terrorists from hideouts now.

In many cases, these hideouts are built within houses in several parts of Jammu & Kashmir especially in heavily populated districts. Virtually undetectable, these hideouts can accommodate three to four terrorists in cramped places when security forces try to locate them, officials said.

Also, they said the construction of hideouts by diehard supporters of terrorists saw a surge during the nearly five months long unrest following the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist Burhan Wani last year. While security forces were busy in restoring law and order, some elements took advantage of the situation and constructed the hideouts without being detected.

Most of the hideouts are constructed in densely populated areas to allow the terrorist to escape by sneaking into the adjacent house if he is detected. The hideouts are built either below the staircase or in the attic by erecting a façade of a semi-pucca wall.

The first two radars are expected to be inducted in the next few weeks and based on the performance of these devices, the Army will then procure 40 to 50 more to enhance capabilities to detect the terrorists, they said.

Three variants of the hand-held radar were tried and the Army opted for the 50-metre range radar due to high quality resolution and detection.

The other two variants included a 15-metre range device costing Rs 9 lakh and a Rs 30 lakh radar with a range of 30-odd metres, they said.

Giving the complexities involved in conducting operations in populated areas, the need was to detect terrorists from a long range to avoid raising an alarm and then close in after locating his position inside the house. Therefore, the 50-metre range radar was selected, officials said.

Business Standard

Sat, 10 June, 2017

A People & their Army

By Shekhar Gupta

A clickbait Gen Rawat-Dyer comparison underlines how eminent postcolonial scholars missed out on the finest Army of this period: India's

Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer was British, but was an officer of the Indian Army. The 50 riflemen who opened fire at a peaceful Baisakhi gathering at Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh, killing 396 and wounding more than a thousand, were Indian soldiers.

Within 25 years, the same Army was fighting on both sides of a small, one-sided but historic war. Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army consisted of Indian prisoners of war with the Axis forces. Within three years, in 1947-48 of that fratricide, the Army was at war again, this time to protect its own nation, in Kashmir.

The colonial Army initially split into two, and eventually into three in 1971, with the same ethos, training and command structures. In both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the same Army has held power more than once, and assassinated elected leaders. Over the decades, Pakistan's Army has so institutionalised its indirect control over power that it calls the shots as elected governments come and go. Why take the opprobrium of martial law?

The Bangladeshi Army has now depoliticised after two decades of Zia-Ershad misadventures. In India, over these decades, the Army has become more apolitical, businesslike. It's also become ethnically, socially and religiously diverse, stepping out of many colonial fixations like martial races and lately batmen (ok, golfing culture has grown, regrettably). The Indian Army's ability to adapt and evolve with times, from Dyer to Azad Hind Fauj to a loyal institution back-stopping a democratic nation, is marvellous and must be acknowledged.

Now survey how post-colonial armies have evolved since World War II: Africa, West Asia, Latin America, Eastern Asia, and definitely the rest of South Asia. Find one sizeable army that stayed out of politics.

The post-colonial evolution of the Army has been widely studied in India, although mostly by scholars and historians of military affairs and generally ignored by the eminences of the social sciences. The period up to the debacle of 1962 is the best documented and it is also the most vital because the Army was still Indianising — there were two categories of officers, holding the King's and the Indian Commission. Defeats tend to produce better, from-the-heart literature and the Army had a generation that inherited a commitment to military literature from its past masters, the British. Subsequently, our military scholarship and literature declined, with just two pieces of work, Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh's War Despatches and Air Chief Marshal P C Lal's My Years With The IAF on the air war in 1971 standing out. There was always Stephen Cohen's The

Indian Army, which, read with his equally thorough The Pakistan Army, is still a standard text to understand the contrasting way the two siblings, separated by a calamity as in old Bollywood films, evolved in their own ways.

Lately, there has been another set of solid publications. Four books by Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, by far the best military historian in India, on Kargil, World War I, the 1965 war (a true classic, coauthored with Lt Gen Tajindar Shergill), and the latest on the Battle of Saragarhi, hailed as the Sikh Regiment's Thermopylae. More importantly three recent works by non-military scholars, Yale Professor Steven Wilkinson (Army and Nation), Srinath Raghavan on how the Army changed between the two great wars (India's War), and, to contrast with, Georgetown University scholar C Christine Fair's Fighting to the End on the Pakistani Army.

I am being deliberately repetitive: I do not find on any bookshelf a substantive study on this fascinating socio-military-political institution, written by a professional Indian social scientist. It is as if the Army, as we wanted, decided to stay out of our life, and our scholars responded by leaving it alone. They demilitarised their minds — even Raghavan, a world-class scholar, is a former Army officer. Let the Army live in its cantonments. It is this intellectual secession from the military that leads to a regrettable misjudgement like the Rawat-Dyer comparison.

To understand how India succeeded in keeping its Army out of politics, Wilkinson is a must-read. He tells you of the evolution of military thought from Cariappa to Manekshaw through four wars and onwards but also of how the system worked together to change the social and ethnic composition of the Army. To make it more diverse over the decades, shrewdly reducing the domination of one ethnicity, the Punjabis, shrugging the Colonial legacy of martial races and, ultimately, assigning recruitment quotas to states according to their population. Of course, he fishes out some nuggets like defence minister Jagjivan Ram's keenness to bring more Dalits into the Army and the letter Manekshaw wrote to Lt Gen S K Sinha to "handle it" — as a Bihari he would know how to do it.

Civilian governments have, however, kept leaning on the Army for help often "in aid to civil power" when it operates under a magistrate's orders and sometimes to fight insurgencies autonomously, empowered by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). The mention of both, ironically, brings Gen Dyer back in our lives.

Whatever Dyer's justification for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, much of the British establishment did not buy into it and it led to the Indian Army (then) instituting new protocols for civilian control, necessitating the presence of a magistrate and written orders for firing at a crowd. These protocols still exist when the Army is called out in aid to civil power. Later, during the Quit India Movement, when the Army had to be employed pro-actively they empowered it with the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance, the father of today's AFSPA. This is documented by Raghavan in his "Protecting the Raj: The Army in India and Internal Security", published in the December 2005 edition of the journal Small Wars and Insurgencies.

Now think, and I too go back to my own memory bank of covering four decades of civil strife and insurgencies. Do we recall any incident of the Army opening fire at a mob and massacring people? Don't tell me about Operation Bluestar, which was a firefight in which 149 Armymen too were killed. Or about Gawakadal in Kashmir, 1990, because it wasn't the Army but paramilitary forces. Nor about many human rights abuses, fake encounters, some rapes, handled relatively leniently till the mid-nineties but subsequently punished firmly. These are excesses in counter-insurgencies. Think mobs and angry crowds. The Army has never had to fire at one, because the bad guys go away the moment they see the Army. Because they know the Army will be tough, and nonpartisan. Communal riots rarely survive a flag-march. In Delhi, 1984, Gujarat, 2002, the Army almost never fired. All the debate about these big massacres is over the delay in calling out the Army.

In Kashmir too, the Army has never been challenged by crowds. Wherever it has operated against terrorists, local people have stayed out of the way. This has lately changed with stone-throwing crowds forming human shields for terrorists. The Army has to find a doctrine to counter this new challenge and it can't be a tit-for-tat use of human shields. But should it fire at crowds that obstruct it? The chief, General Bipin Rawat, talking

aloud, or may be fulminating, could surely have chosen his words better. But also put yourself in his boots. A new doctrine now needs to be evolved for a new situation, and the Army will do it. You won't see more Kashmiris driven in front of Army columns. Nor will the Army massacre hundreds, Dyer style. That's why this comparison is contemptuous of reality. And perverse.



Sat, 10 June, 2017

New type of cruise missile tested: N Korea

Pyongyang on Friday hailed the successful test of a new type of surface-to-ship cruise missile, which it said was designed to hit “any enemy group of battleships” that threatened North Korea. The launch Thursday -- the North's fifth weapons test in a month -- was overseen by leader Kim Jong-Un, the State-run Korean Central News Agency reported, and came less than a week after the United Nations tightened sanctions against the Stalinist regime.

“The launched cruise rockets accurately detected and hit the floating targets on the East Sea of Korea,” KCNA said, referring to the Sea of Japan -- where two US aircraft carriers were carrying out naval manoeuvres last week. The USS Carl Vinson and the USS Ronald Reagan led the three-day exercises that ended June 3, with a total of a dozen US ships participating along with two Japanese vessels, in a show of force directed at North Korea. The US has stepped up its muscle-flexing in the region, with a US nuclear submarine, the 6,900-ton USS Cheyenne, whose home port is Pearl Harbor, also arriving in the South Korean port of Busan Tuesday. North Korea has ordered three ballistic missile launches, a surface-to-air missile, and now yesterday's cruise missile tests since South Korea's new President Moon Jae-in took power in early May.

The short range missiles flew some 200 kilometres (124 miles) which is an improvement on a 2015 test, when a North Korean surfaceto-ship cruise missile flew only 100 kilometres, said Korea Defence Forum analyst Shin Jong-Woo. “This is another sign of meaningful progress in the North's efforts to diversify its missiles. It will pose a considerable threat to US and South Korean navies,” he told AFP. KCNA said that the weapon tested Thursday had been part of the military parade in Pyongyang on April 15 to mark the birthday of the North's founding father Kim Il-Sung. All of the weapons on display at the extravagant military parade have been tested in the last month, except for one which analysts said appeared to be an intercontinental ballistic missile, Yonhap news agency reported.

Moon advocated reconciliation with Seoul's isolated, unpredictable neighbour but has taken a more stern position in the wake of the missile tests, which pose a policy challenge to the left-leaning leader. The launches come less than a week after the United Nations expanded sanctions against Kim Jong-Un's regime in response to the string of recent ballistic missile tests.