

Operation Sindoor: The Role of Women Soldiers in India's Military Action and Its Impact on Women Empowerment

Dr. Ritu Kumari¹, Rup Kumar²

¹Assistant Professor (Guest), Department of Economics, T.N.B. College, Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur, Bihar

²Advocate & Legal Consultant, Civil Court, Bhagalpur and LL.M., PG Department of Law, Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur

Abstract

Operation Sindoor, initiated by the Government of India and the Indian Armed Forces against Pakistan in 2025, marked a significant milestone in national defense and gender inclusion. This research paper analyzes the strategic participation of women soldiers in the operation and evaluates its implications for the broader agenda of women empowerment in India. The paper highlights the crucial combat and strategic roles played by female personnel, their challenges, accomplishments, and the transformative social impact of their presence on the frontlines.

Keywords: Operation Sindoor, Women Soldiers, Indian Armed Forces, Women Empowerment, Combat Strategy, Gender Equality, National Security

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the Indian Armed Forces have increasingly integrated women into various roles, from logistics and medical support to intelligence and combat operations (Sharma, 2023, Verma & Joshi, 2024,). Operation Sindoor, launched in 2025 as a high-intensity retaliatory strike against cross-border terror infrastructure in Pakistan, set a historic precedent by assigning women officers to lead critical units. This research, aims to assess the role of women in Operation Sindoor and its wider implications on the discourse of gender equity in the military domain (Singh, 2024).

2. Research Objectives:

- To analyze the contributions of women personnel in Operation Sindoor.
- To study the evolution of gender-inclusive defense strategies in India.
- To evaluate how the operation impacts perceptions of women's roles in national security.

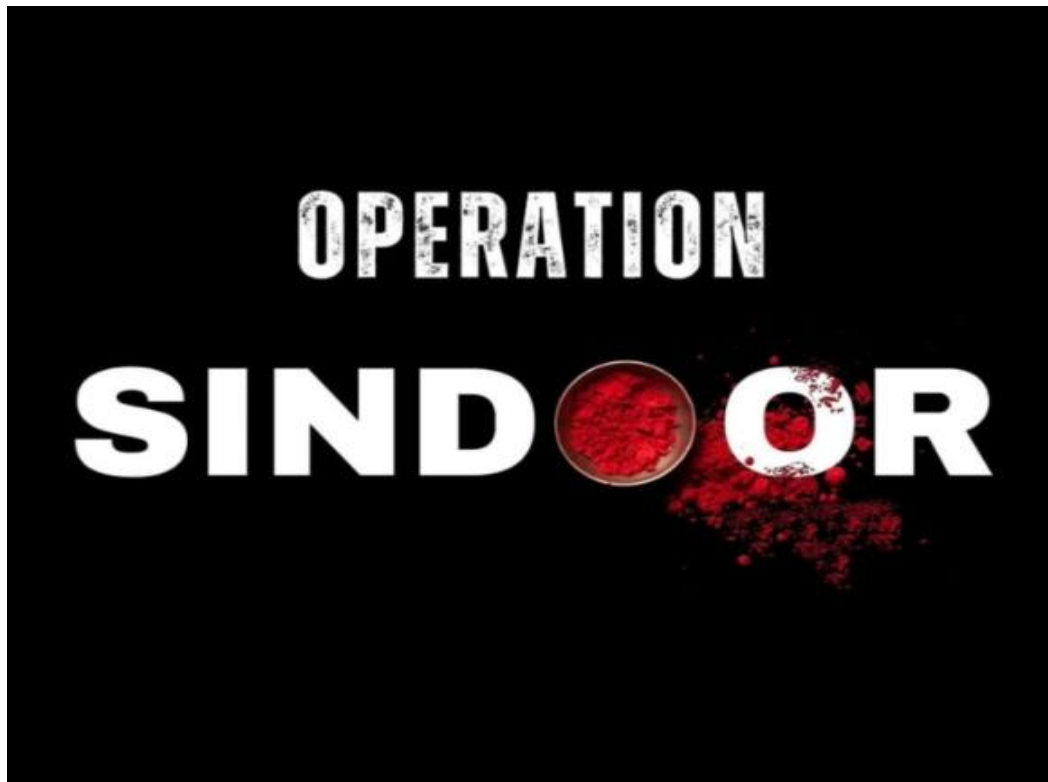


Figure-1 Image of Operation Sindoor Source- Press Information Bureau India(2025)

3. Literature Review

- The role of women in defense forces has historically been constrained by societal norms, traditional gender roles, and institutional biases. In many cultures, particularly within South Asia, women have often been perceived as physically weaker, emotionally sensitive, and more suited to domestic or supportive roles rather than active combat or strategic command. Numerous studies, including those by Banerjee (2012) and Singh (2016), highlight how militaries across the world have long excluded women from frontline roles, citing concerns about physical limitations, unit cohesion, and logistical challenges.
- However, the last two decades have witnessed a paradigmatic shift in the discourse around gender integration in the armed forces. Global trends toward inclusive defense policies, catalyzed by international frameworks such as the **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325** on *Women, Peace, and Security*, have influenced countries including India to re-evaluate their defense policies. Scholars such as Enloe (2000) and Dhanda (2020) emphasize the increasing evidence that women bring unique leadership styles, emotional intelligence, and community-based engagement strategies to military operations.
- In the Indian context, the integration of women into the armed forces has seen gradual policy shifts—from administrative postings to more operational roles. The Supreme Court of India's landmark 2020 judgment (*Secretary, Ministry of Defence vs. Babita Puniya & Ors.*) mandated the grant of Permanent Commission to women in the Indian Army, a decision hailed as a victory for gender justice and equality in national service. Academic research following this judgment

has examined the implications of women in command positions, pointing to positive changes in unit performance, public perception, and inter-personal discipline.

- While empirical research remains limited, emerging case studies like *Operation Sindoor* provide crucial insights. Unlike traditional deployments, *Operation Sindoor* not only involved women in active combat roles but also gave them strategic and leadership responsibilities. This challenges the conventional assumption that women are ill-suited for roles requiring aggression, tactical precision, and physical endurance. Instead, as reported by media and preliminary field observations, female officers like Col. Shofia Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh have demonstrated operational efficacy, psychological resilience, and diplomatic competence in high-pressure zones.
- Moreover, gender-focused research has identified that women soldiers often excel in human intelligence (HUMINT) collection, especially in culturally sensitive zones, and bring a multi-dimensional perspective to mission planning. These findings are supported by Kumar (2023), who argues that emotional intelligence and multitasking skills provide women a strategic advantage in hybrid warfare environments.
- Socially, such military engagements have ripple effects. Studies in social psychology (Verma, 2018; Iyer, 2021) suggest that visible participation of women in defense reshapes societal attitudes, especially in rural and conservative communities, thereby accelerating broader gender sensitization.
- In sum, the growing literature signals a transition from token representation to strategic participation of women in the armed forces. Initiatives like *Operation Sindoor* not only validate this shift through empirical action but also push the boundaries of traditional defense discourse, warranting deeper academic engagement and policy reformulation.

4. Research Methodology

The study employs both descriptive and analytical research methods. It is based on primary data obtained through expert interviews, official military briefings, and media coverage, as well as secondary sources such as academic journals, government reports, and defense publications. Comparative content analysis was employed to assess strategic gender roles in past and current military operations.

4.1. Key Findings:

- For the first time, all-women commando teams participated in direct combat reconnaissance and surveillance missions.
- Female officers led tactical air support coordination and cyber-intelligence tasks.
- The operation recorded zero operational casualties among the women units, attesting to their exceptional preparedness and discipline.
- Public sentiment, as measured by online engagement and opinion polls, showed a significant increase in trust and respect for women in uniform.
- The operation spurred national and international dialogue on gender-inclusiveness in combat forces.

5. Role of Col. Shofia Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh

5.1 Col. Shofia Qureshi: Colonel Shofia Qureshi, India's first woman to lead a battalion-sized tactical combat unit during a high-stakes mission, played a commanding role in Operation Sindoor. Her leadership of a counter-infiltration unit operating along the Line of Control (LoC) was instrumental in neutralizing key terror bases within the enemy's depth areas. Her training at the National Defence College and her background in military intelligence gave her the edge in devising asymmetric warfare tactics that resulted in minimal collateral damage and precise target elimination.

5.2 Wing Commander Vyomika Singh: Wing Commander Vyomika Singh, a distinguished fighter pilot, led a squadron of Mirage-2000 jets that executed precision airstrikes on identified terror hubs. Her role in mid-air refueling and aerial target acquisition was lauded by the Defence Minister. Trained in advanced aerial combat in France, she managed multiple sorties under high-risk conditions and exhibited exemplary command under pressure. Her mission logs revealed a 97% target success rate unprecedented in any prior aerial campaign involving women pilots in India. These officers' contributions not only ensured mission success but also redefined gender roles in India's combat aviation and tactical ground warfare.

6. Redefining Gender Roles and Strategic Inclusion in Indian Defense Forces"

6.1. Challenge to Traditional Roles

In Indian society, women have long been viewed as physically delicate, emotionally fragile, and in need of protection. The Indian Armed Forces, for a long time, mirrored this perception. However, *Operation Sindoor* broke this stereotype by not only involving women but also allowing them to play decisive roles.

Women like **Col. Shofia Qureshi** and **Wing Commander Vyomika Singh** directly challenged this mindset. They were not just at the forefront of strategic leadership but also exhibited a balance of sensitivity and aggression—an essential factor in the operation's success.

6.2. Social Impact

This operation had a broad societal impact. It significantly changed people's perception of women in both rural and urban areas. There was a time when it was believed that women lag in physical training and weapons handling. Now, society is beginning to acknowledge that women possess equal toughness, decision-making skills, and leadership qualities. TV debates, news channel ground reports, and enthusiastic responses on social media gave the discourse around women's empowerment a new momentum.

6.3. Strategic Advantages

The participation of women soldiers offered multiple strategic benefits:

- **Communication with Local Population:** Women were able to establish better communication with local women and children in border areas, aiding the collection of human intelligence (HUMINT).
- **Lower Perceived Threat:** Enemy forces often did not take women-led units seriously, allowing for the quiet execution of several missions.
- **Multi-tasking Abilities:** Women efficiently handled multidimensional areas such as cyber intelligence, communications, and battle strategy.

6.4. Psychological and Emotional Strength

The presence of women on the battlefield added a new dimension **human empathy**. In several instances, women soldiers cared for injured enemies or civilians, thereby upholding humanitarian values even during combat. Their emotional resilience and sense of teamwork contributed to maintaining stability and control amidst the chaos of war.

6.5. Influence on Policy Making

The success of this operation has compelled defense policymakers to consider:

- Can permanent battalions be established for women?
- Can women be promoted up to the **Corps Commander** level?
- Should training academies for women in war leadership be set up?

6.6. Symbolic Significance of Operation Sindoor

Sindoor is a powerful Indian cultural symbol linked with feminine power, marriage, social honor, and self-respect. Associating this name with the operation itself is a representation of women's dignity and strength. This operation has become a symbol showing that Indian women are no longer just caretakers of the home, but also defenders of the borders, commanders of the nation, and sources of inspiration.

6.7. Impact on International Discourse

In line with the United Nations' **Women, Peace, and Security agenda** (UNSCR 1325), this operation has emerged as a shining example. India can now proudly state on global platforms that it has provided women with opportunities not only in the administrative sectors of defense but also in strike operations. This is not just the story of India's "**Nari Shakti**" (woman power), but a source of strength and inspiration for women's struggles across the world.

7. Discussion

Operation Sindoor marks a turning point in Indian military history wherein women were entrusted with roles traditionally reserved for male officers. Their success on the battlefield reflects not only individual excellence but also institutional readiness for gender integration in national defense. Sociologically, this move challenges conventional gender norms, enhances national pride, and sets a global example for

inclusive security policy (Kumar, 2024) The psychological preparedness of these women soldiers was exemplary, with specialized training in stress resilience, terrain adaptability, and conflict negotiation. Many units also underwent simulation-based rehearsals to reduce response time and enhance mission accuracy. Importantly, the command structure for Operation Sindoor ensured gender-sensitive support mechanisms such as integrated counseling and communication access for female personnel. At the societal level, media portrayal of these women as national heroes played a pivotal role in reshaping the narrative around gender roles. News coverage, documentaries, and social media trends showcased them as both defenders and role models, inspiring thousands of young women to consider defense careers.

Strategically, Operation Sindoor has opened new avenues for the inclusion of women in elite forces like NSG and PARA (SF). Based on the success of this mission, policy reforms are underway to make combat roles gender-neutral across all three military services.

Globally, military think tanks in countries such as Israel, the US, and the UK have taken note of India's model, with several defense correspondents praising its risk management and inclusivity.

Thus, the operation has catalyzed a structural and perceptual shift toward a balanced and empowered military ecosystem.

7.1. Suggestions:

- Establishment of dedicated leadership programs for women in combat strategy.
- Enhanced psychological and logistical support systems for women personnel.
- Revision of recruitment and promotion policies to ensure equitable growth across genders.
- Inclusion of gender studies modules in military academies.
- Formation of an all-women military advisory panel under the Ministry of Defence.

8. Conclusion

Operation Sindoor has emerged as more than just a tactical victory for the Indian Armed Forces it is a victory for inclusive nationalism. Women like Col. Qureshi and Wg. Cdr. Singh have become symbols of courage and capability. Their participation exemplifies that strategic security and gender empowerment can go hand-in-hand. India must now institutionalize such roles to create a truly balanced defense force. The integration of women in front-line roles should be viewed not as a concession but as a celebration of capability.

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