

Uniformed Women in UN Peacekeeping Operations An Assessment of India's Contribution

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The defect in the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 has occurred by viewing rationales for increasing uniformed women peacekeepers from the instrumentalist perspective. The slow rate of increase in uniformed women peacekeepers is not solely because of the low contribution by developing countries. Indian uniformed women peacekeepers have played an impactful role in some of the most challenging operational environments, thereby shattering the general perception of women peacekeepers not being deployed in high-risk areas, or where the need for a gender perspective is greatest. Another major contribution by India is the creation of international and national specialised training courses on gender issues which are being used to prepare prospective peacekeepers. The ways to increase the participation of uniformed women peacekeepers are by addressing the challenges they confront in the field, ensuring that gender mainstreaming is the whole-of-the-mission's responsibility, and by making a conscious effort to promote gender equality.

Keywords: *Gender Mainstreaming, Instrumentalist Perspective, Gender Segregation, Gender Equality, Gendered Perspective*

INTRODUCTION

Peacekeeping operations have evolved as the most visible mechanism of the United Nations (UN) to manage conflict when the collective security system provided in the UN Charter failed to operationalise due to the

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Cold War. When the nature of conflict changed from inter-state to intrastate in the post-Cold War, the UN used the same mechanism of peacekeeping operations with expanded roles and functions.

Unlike inter-state conflicts, intrastate conflicts generate humanitarian crises, with large-scale atrocities on the civilians who experience mass-scale killings, detention, torture, disappearance, refugee, internal displacement, human trafficking, and so on. The discriminatory and oppressed position of women and girls in the pre-conflict stage is further exacerbated by intrastate conflict, placing them in a more vulnerable position than men and boys. Therefore, women and girls are disproportionately affected by intrastate conflicts. Although the roles and responsibilities of the UN peacekeeping operations have been expanded since 1989, with the mandate for multidimensional functions, the UN Security Council (UNSC) did not give a specific mandate to protect civilians till late 1999.

The failure of UN peacekeeping operations in the 1990s to deal with the vast-scale violation of human rights and humanitarian law in some high-profile cases such as Bosnia, Rwanda and Somalia, affected its legitimacy as well as the credibility of the UN in general. The moral and political pressure of the international community compelled the UNSC to give a specific mandate for the protection of civilians (POC) for the first time in October 1999 to the UN mission in Sierra Leone. Since then, the POC has become one of the core tasks of the UN peacekeeping operations.¹

The peculiar vulnerability of women and girls in intrastate conflicts has been witnessed since the early 1990s, which gave rise to the demand for a gendered approach to the conflict. The women's movement and civil society organisations called for upgrading the issues of women and girls from development to security agenda in international discourse. The Beijing Conference on Women in 1995 demanded mainstreaming gender into all UN activities, including security and conflict resolution activities. Beijing's Platform for Action has a separate section on 'Women and Armed Conflict' which emphasises the need to place women's issues in the discourse on security.² The women's movement and civil society organisations intensified their demand for this after the Beijing Conference.

For the first time in history, women's concerns were formally discussed and acknowledged in the UNSC, which unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in October

2000. This Resolution is considered a ground-breaking achievement as it shifts the attention from women as victims to women as resources.³ The Resolution has been hailed as a major step towards understanding the differential impact of conflict as well as the necessity for including women in different phases of peace making, peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

This article starts with a discussion on three major pillars of Resolution 1325 to emphasise that it advocates the protection of women in conflict areas; the participation of uniformed women peacekeepers in UN missions; takes into account the gender perspectives; and promotes gender equality. It then discusses various rationales for the increasing participation of uniformed women peacekeepers, and points out how these rationales view women's participation from an instrumentalist perspective, neglecting the rights-based equality component of the UNSC Resolution 1325. It discusses various reasons for the low participation of uniformed women peacekeepers despite the UN's efforts to increase their numbers. The major section delves into India's contribution of uniformed women peacekeepers, with suitable examples from various UN peacekeeping missions. It highlights the deployment of the All-Female Formed Police Unit (FFPU) by India to Liberia (UNMIL) in 2007 as an innovative alternative means of deploying uniformed women peacekeepers. It also highlights how India has taken the lead in conducting both international and national specialised training courses on gender issues, such as a conflict-related sexual violence course, and the female military officers' course. It ends with focusing on the challenges confronting uniformed women peacekeepers in the field.

PARTICIPATION OF UNIFORMED WOMEN PEACEKEEPERS

The UNSC Resolution 1325 has been hailed as a major step towards understanding the differential impact of conflict, and stresses the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. It has comprehensive provisions dealing with various dimensions of the gender issue.

The provisions of the resolution could be categorised into three major pillars:

1. *Representation and Participation*: The Resolution urges member states to increase the representation and active participation of women at all decision-making levels relating to conflict

prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. This aspect of the resolution aims to promote gender empowerment and gender equality.

2. *Gender Perspective:* The Resolution states that gender perspectives should be adopted in the planning and implementation of peacekeeping operations and peace negotiations. It attempts to ensure that women's concerns are taken into account in peace and security matters. This aspect of the Resolution aims to ensure that women's voices are heard, and taken into account at the highest level.
3. *Protection:* The Resolution emphasises the need for increased attention to the protection and respect of women's rights, including protection against gender-based violence. This aspect of the Resolution highlights the need to protect women and girls in conflict areas because of their peculiar vulnerability.

The three pillars indicate that, apart from protection and participation, the UN must ensure that gender perspective and gender equality are central to all activities. The UNSC has cemented its commitment by subsequently adopting nine follow-up resolutions. The Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda now consists of UNSC Resolution 1325, and nine follow-up resolutions.

The UN has been attempting to increase the participation of uniformed women peacekeepers since the adoption of Resolution 1325, as this Resolution specifically calls for the increased participation of women in UN peacekeeping operations. The UN has issued several numerical targets to increase the participation of uniformed women peacekeepers, and issued appeals to Troop-Contributing-Countries/Police-Contributing-Countries (TCCs/PCCs) to enhance the contribution of uniformed women to UN missions. Various rationales have driven it to increase the participation of uniformed women in UN peacekeeping operations.

One of the most frequent rationales given is that women have specific traits which enable them to excel at tasks that men cannot perform. It has been highlighted that the women can engage with the local community more effectively, and bring about greater situational awareness. They also improve intelligence gathering by interacting with the local community, local women's groups, and other organisations. The local community and women also find it easier to interact with women peacekeepers as they are less intimidating than men peacekeepers. Moreover, the presence of

women peacekeepers is also expected to provide a greater sense of security to local populations as well as reduce conflict and confrontation.⁴

Another often-cited rationale is that uniformed women peacekeepers are more sensitive to the needs and challenges of civilians in conflict areas. They are better at protecting civilians, especially women and children. Due to their compassionate or empathetic response, women peacekeepers are also perceived to be particularly suitable in dealing with women victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). It is often claimed that it is “easier” for a raped woman to talk to another woman about the assault on her.⁵

The UN guidelines document also claims that mixed patrolling teams are better than only male units, and that ‘the presence of female military personnel can boost protection and response strategies as local women and children more readily confide in female peacekeepers — especially in the case of sexual violence.’⁶ During a discussion in the UNSC, the UN Secretary General stated, ‘The presence of more women in troop contingents is also credited with higher reporting of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as lower incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse.’⁷ The UN also claims that, ‘Women peacekeepers are essential enablers to build trust and confidence with local communities and help improving access and support for local women, for example, by interacting with women in societies where women are prohibited from speaking to men.’⁸

Another frequently cited rationale for the increase in uniformed women peacekeepers is that they have a comparative practical advantage in carrying out certain activities, such as house searches, body searches, working in women’s prisons, interviewing victims of SGBV, providing escorts for victims/witnesses, and screening women combatants at disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) sites.⁹ Thus, increasing the number of uniformed women peacekeepers broadens the skills available within peacekeeping missions.

The attempt to increase uniformed women peacekeepers is also because they serve as a powerful inspiration and role models for local women and girls in conflict areas to assert their rights in society, and pursue non-traditional careers. In this way, uniformed women peacekeepers promote more equitable gender relations within the local community.¹⁰

However, these often-cited rationales to increase uniformed women peacekeepers are viewed from an instrumentalist perspective, and often neglect the rights-based equality component of the UNSC Resolution

1325. Both the high-ranking officials and important UN documents focus only on the instrumentalist justification. For instance, the former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, held such a view as he has said, 'Gender parity is as important here [in policing] as it is across our agenda. It is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end: greater efficiency, greater effectiveness.'¹¹ The present UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has also stated in the UN Security Council that, 'This is not just a question of numbers, but also of our effectiveness in fulfilling our mandates.'¹² The UN peacekeeping website, which deals with 'Why is it important to have women peacekeepers?' does not delve into the rights-based gender equality aspect of uniformed women's participation in the UN peacekeeping operations.¹³

The Resolution expects gender equality and representativeness to be seen as ends in themselves. The UN peacekeeping operations are required to make gender equality central to all their activities. Women become peacekeepers 'not primarily to help other women, but rather to improve their own career prospects or increase their earning potential.'¹⁴ The rights-based approach of gender equality would have highlighted the need for gender parity as the women have opted for a career in the military or police forces for the same practical reasons as men, such as for stable jobs, decent salaries, good benefits, opportunities to challenge themselves, and prove their capability and professionalism even in a male-dominated and masculine-oriented service.

The Resolution expected UN peacekeeping operations to promote gender equality not only for women peacekeepers but also for local women in the areas of their deployment. However, in actual practice, there is a view that '...rights-based arguments are increasingly marginalised in the literature, rhetoric, and institutional strategy relating to women peacekeepers in favour of the instrumentalist argument stressing women's positive impact on operational effectiveness.'¹⁵ The dominance of the instrumentalist discourse denies the crucial need to challenge embedded stereotypes, and undermine the discourse of inequality. It is ironic that uniformed women peacekeepers, who are required to promote gender equality in the local community in the areas of their deployment, do not have their right to equality taken into account in UN missions.

Low Number of Participation

During the Cold War, there were very few women peacekeepers in UN peacekeeping operations which dealt mostly with interstate conflicts.

In the 32 years between 1957 and 1989, only 20 women served as UN peacekeepers.¹⁶ Even while dealing with the intrastate conflicts of the 1990s, no conscious attempts were made to increase the number of uniformed women peacekeepers. In 1993, for instance, women made up only 1 per cent of deployed uniformed personnel.¹⁷

Since the adoption of Resolution 1325, the UN set numerical targets to increase the percentage of women peacekeepers in all aspects of peacekeeping operations several times. Even then, the rise in the proportion of women in UN peacekeeping operations has been slow. In August 2006, when the UN started to record data on women military participants in UN peacekeeping operations, only 1.85 per cent of women participated in UN peacekeeping operations.¹⁸ By December 2009, women military personnel made up 2.4 per cent and the police 6.6 per cent.¹⁹ In October 2015, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2242, which called for 'doubling of the numbers of women in military and police contingents of UN peacekeeping operations over the next five years.'²⁰ Despite all efforts to increase the number of uniformed women peacekeepers, women military personnel in UN operations were just 4 per cent; women police personnel were 11.35 per cent by December 2017.²¹

Against this backdrop of low participation of the uniformed women peacekeepers, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations put forward its Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028. This Strategy sets targets for the next one decade. It has targeted that, by 2028, women should constitute 15 per cent of deployed contingent troops, 30 per cent of individual police officers, and 20 per cent of formed police units.²² Even to the top troops and police-contributing countries, these targets seem ambitious. As of December 2021, 7.8 per cent of all uniformed military, police, justice, and corrections personnel in field missions are women.

Although the UN has been engaged in much rhetoric to increase the number of uniformed women peacekeepers and has set the numerical targets, it could only encourage and advocate for more contribution of uniformed women peacekeepers by the TCCs/PCCs. The UN lacks the ability to enforce compliance among its member states.

Two major reasons have been attributed for the lack of compliance. Some authors have argued that TCCs/PCCs may be reluctant to send female peacekeepers as they consider it risky, and fear a backlash if something were to happen to them in peacekeeping deployment. Many of

the national security structures of TCCs/PCCs, being male-dominated, see women needing protection rather than viewing them as providers of protection.²³ Therefore, they are reluctant to send uniformed women to the UN missions.

There is a general view among those who contribute uniformed women peacekeepers that they contribute to so-called less risky operations. They avoid sending uniformed women peacekeepers to mission environments associated with high conflict intensity, and the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence. Thus, the relative risk of a mission influences the TCCs/PCCs of the allocation patterns of uniformed women peacekeepers.²⁴ Some are of the view that the deployment of uniformed women peacekeepers in low-risk mission environments means that they would not be deployed where the need for a gender perspective is greatest where levels of sexual violence are high, or gender inequality is particularly rampant.²⁵

Others have argued that uniformed women peacekeepers are less likely to be deployed in the early stages of missions because new missions are associated with high levels of operational uncertainty and risk. The participation of uniformed women peacekeepers tends to increase with the decrease in uncertainty, and when the operating environment becomes predictable.²⁶ Thus, the concept of risk highly influences withholding uniformed women peacekeepers from participation in UN peacekeeping operations. This could mean that leaders of TCCs/PCCs are influenced by gender stereotypes which consider women need to be protected, rather than deployed in UN missions as protectors.

The second major reason for the low participation of uniformed women peacekeepers is the reflection of heavily masculine national-level military and police structures of developing countries, and the under-representation of women in these security sectors. The TCCs/PCCs have their own national regulations and practices regarding the recruitment of women and which parts of the national security sectors are open to women. Therefore, the low participation of uniformed women peacekeepers is simply the non-availability of women in the pool from which TCCs/PCCs draw their recruitment for UN deployment. Because of this perception, the UN has diverted a great deal of attention to the need for a National Action Plan in the TCCs/PCCs to increase the recruitment and retention of women in national security sectors.

The developed countries, which have achieved greater gender parity in their military and police sectors, have also not contributed

the required percentage of uniformed women peacekeepers for UN operations. The contribution of uniformed women peacekeepers by the permanent members of the UNSC has been minuscule, as reflected in Table 1. Thus, the failure to meet the numerical targets of uniformed women peacekeepers is not solely because of the low contribution of the developing countries, or the lack of gender parity in domestic security sectors.

Table 1 Permanent Members' Women Contribution of Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers, and Troops

<i>January/ Year</i>	<i>China</i>		<i>France</i>		<i>Russia</i>		<i>United Kingdom</i>		<i>United States</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
2022	2,141	102	585	50	67	12	481	42	27	4
2021	2,388	77	573	50	51	11	490	39	26	4
2020	2,459	85	668	64	68	10	524	49	29	1
2019	2,438	70	689	55	70	14	585	27	35	6
2018	2,575	59	750	73	70	13	670	59	50	7

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping (n), 'Troop and Police Contributors,' at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

Some authors have pointed out that women's participation in UN peacekeeping operations is hindered by a lack of awareness of the UN's deployment options for women, and also biases in the deployment selection of the authorities in TCCs/PCCs.²⁷ Some see peacekeepers as mercenaries, especially given the insensitive suggestion of the need to incentivise the TCCs/PCCs by offering them monetary incentives to provide more women peacekeepers for UN missions.²⁸

INDIA'S CONTRIBUTION

India has played a pioneering role in devising an innovative mechanism of peacekeeping operation to maintain international peace and security when the collective security system of the UN Charter could not be operationalised. Peacekeeping was a mechanism wherein the soldiers were deployed not for fighting but to maintain peace. India had taken part in 7 of the 13 peacekeeping operations between 1948 and 1987. Despite the dramatic change in the role and functions of peacekeeping operations in the post-Cold War, India continues to be the longest, and one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. Moreover, Indian peacekeepers have served in some of the most physically demanding and harshest operational environments.²⁹

India has a long tradition of deploying women in UN peacekeeping missions. As early as 1960, India sent women in the Armed Forces Medical Services to serve in the UN Peacekeeping Mission in the Republic of Congo.³⁰ The Indian medical team to Congo, comprising both men and women, provided medical treatment to UN personnel and numerous civilian Congolese.

The Defence Ministry of India inducted women into the national army in all branches, apart from supportive medical roles, in 1992. Thus, in the post-Cold War, apart from women forming a part of Medical Units, the Indian army has also contributed lady military officers and Staff Officers to UN missions. When the UN started deploying the police to deal with law and order issues in conflict-affected countries, India started contributing women police officers. Since the adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2000, the Government of India has pledged to increase its share of uniformed women peacekeepers for the UN missions. Various Indian uniformed women peacekeepers have played an exemplary role in the operational fields. For instance, Major Shobha Nair, who was commissioned into the Indian Army in 2006, served as a Military Officer in MONUC. Through her experiences during daily patrols, she came to believe that women's involvement in peacekeeping has a positive effect on the mission's relations with the local population. She felt that her presence on such patrols made young girls and women feel more comfortable about being forthcoming about their experiences and fears.³¹

Major Suman Gawani is another example of an Indian woman military officer who served in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) from November 2018 to December 2019. She was the focal point of contact for gender issues in the mission. She encouraged the participation of women in joint military patrols to maintain gender balance. She also visited various mission sites across South Sudan in an attempt to integrate a gender perspective into planning and military activities. She trained South Sudanese government forces, and helped them launch their action plan to deal with conflict-related sexual violence. For her distinguished service as a peacekeeper with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), she was awarded the UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year, 2019.³²

India has also contributed women police officers to UN missions. For instance, Shakti Devi was an Indian woman police officer who was one of the 13 police personnel deployed by India in the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT). She served in this mission

between February 2012 and November 2012. Her role was to mentor the East Timor Police to improve their policing, assist them in investigations, and register cases focusing particularly on handling women-related issues in police stations.³³

Later, she served in the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) from 2013 to 2015. She played a critical role in leading the establishment of Women Police Councils in various parts of Afghanistan. She assisted them in their attempt to achieve the goal of democratic principles of policing. She also contributed to improving the status of female police officers in the Afghan national police. Inspector Devi remained consistently engaged in improving the service to victims of sexual and gender-based violence. She closely collaborated with the Head of the Gender and Human and Child Rights Unit in the Afghanistan Ministry of Interior (MOI), resulting in several arrests for crimes regarding sexual and gender-based violence. She was instrumental in promoting gender-related training and mentoring, and providing support for the Prosecutor for the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW). In 2014, she received the International Police Peacekeeper Award for her service in UNAMA.³⁴

Kiran Bedi was another distinguished Indian woman police officer who held a high-ranking post at the UN headquarters. She was India's first and highest-ranking woman police officer, having joined the Indian Police Service in 1972. She was appointed as Civilian Police Adviser in 2003 in the Department of Peacekeeping Operation in the UN. She became the first woman to serve as the United Nations Police Adviser.

All-Female Formed Police Unit

India's most creative and innovative deployment was the All-Female Formed Police Unit (FFPU) to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2007. It was the first-ever all-women team in UN peacekeeping history. Despite Liberia being one of the most difficult operational environments, the Indian FFPU continued to serve until the end of the mission. By the time the mission closed in 2016, nine FFPU had rotated in this mission. This deployment of Indian women police in a risky operation contradicts the general notion, discussed earlier in this article, that TCCs/PCCs tend to avoid sending uniformed women peacekeepers to risky missions.

This unit had the responsibility of implementing mandated tasks, such as the protection of UN staff and local authorities (including

protecting President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf), providing security during local events, riot control, conducting night patrols in and around Monrovia as well as mentoring and assisting in the capacity building of local security institutions, such as the Liberian National Police and the Liberian Armed Forces.³⁵ Further, the FFPU was also responsible for reporting on cases of sexual and gender-based violence in Monrovia. A gender affair associate is reported to have noted that FFPU presence alone appeared to 'encourage Liberian women to report instances of sexual violence'.³⁶

The unit also carried out various outreach programmes, using their immense energy and personal time. The mission's leadership also encouraged the female units to develop their own outreach activities, and cultivate a greater sense of contribution.³⁷ They carried out outreach programmes such as free medical services, and providing clean drinking water to the local population, alongside a range of classes conducted in local schools, such as on self-defence, dance, computer literacy and knitting. The FFPU also adopted an orphanage close to their compound, helping with its day-to-day running.³⁸ Liberian girls have been reported to have spoken about learning personal confidence and esteem from the Indian police women in their midst. There were also reports of sexual abuse and exploitation rates dropping sharply in the community as well as a dramatic increase in the number of girls enrolling in school.³⁹ The Indian government also indicated that the Indian women peacekeepers, through their voluntary work of offering self-defence, computer classes, and medical and water services in Liberia, 'set an example of what women can achieve through community engagement'.⁴⁰ This was a kind of 'second shift role' that the Indian uniformed women peacekeepers performed in Liberia.

Another major contribution of the FFPU in Liberia has been serving as powerful mentors and role models for the local women and girls. Liberia's Gender and Development Minister, Ms Vabah Gayflor, reported that women's participation in peacekeeping provides new role models and new hope for Liberia's girls and young women who have been victimised by years of conflict.⁴¹ Because of the encouragement and the role models set by Indian police women, the numbers of female recruitment in the local security sector increased from 6 per cent in 2007 to 17 per cent when they left the mission in 2016.⁴²

The performance of India's FFPU was praised and appreciated by many high-ranking officials. For instance, then UN Secretary-General,

Ban Ki-moon, said, 'through their work, they managed criminality, deterred sexual and gender-based violence, and helped rebuild safety and confidence among the population'.⁴³ During the farewell ceremony of Indian FFPU, the then President of Liberia underlined their contribution in 'inspiring Liberian women, imparting in them the spirit of professionalism, and encouraging them to join operations that protect the nation'.⁴⁴

Because of their dedication, professionalism and motivation, India's FFPU proved to be a professional, visible role-model, gaining worldwide attention for their contribution to Liberian society. Table 2 shows that, with the end of FFPU in 2016, there was a sharp drop down in the percentage of India's contribution of women peacekeepers to the UN missions for a few years.

Female Engagement Team in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Another major landmark contribution of India to uniformed women peacekeepers was the deployment of its first Female Engagement Team (FET) to the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in June 2019. The FET from India comprises 22 women peacekeepers who are deployed in one of the most challenging peacekeeping missions under the UN flag. The Indian Military Advisor at the Indian Mission to UN stated that this deployment is in line with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' priority and initiative to ensure increased participation of women peacekeepers.⁴⁵

Although the female team has been drawn from the police sector, it has been co-deployed with the 16th Sikh Battalion of the Indian Army. Captain Preeti Sharma, Commander of the Indian Female Engagement Team (FET), stated that her team works alongside the male contingent, and performs every task done by male peacekeepers.⁴⁶ The mandate of the female team encompasses patrolling, assistance in the conduct of investigations, riot control, and rescue operations in cases where women and children are involved. Moreover, the team also assesses the security situation of local women and children, and provides assistance in cases of sexual violence. The deployment of FET in the DRC, which is a high-risk operational environment, once again contradicts the general notion, as discussed earlier in the article, that uniformed women peacekeepers would not be deployed where the need for a gender perspective is greatest.

The FET also engages with the local community through friendship meetings with leaders, women representatives, and other local

functionaries. These meetings enable the FET to collect information about problems in the local community, assess the security situation, use the information to focus on patrolling in high-risk areas, and plan civil–military coordination activities based on the needs of communities.⁴⁷ The team has also undertaken several outreach programmes in the local community on a voluntary basis, which are second shift roles. It carries out activities such as self-defence programmes, language training, skill development, and computer programmes to help the local community. Particularly, the team conducted self-defence programmes as it realised that local women and girls are not able to fulfil their aspirations and dreams due to security concerns. When the team started a self-defence programme for local females in schools and villages, it was very enthusiastically received.⁴⁸

The team also serves as a powerful mentor and role model for the local women and girls to achieve their own dreams and aspirations. Captain Preeti Sharma said that when the local women and girls see the UN uniformed women peacekeepers, they get inspired to dream big, and fulfil their aspirations. She emphasises that women bring unique value and perspective to peacekeeping operations.⁴⁹

India has also pledged a woman Formed Police Unit (FPU) under the Peacekeeping Readiness Capability System.

Table 2 India's Women Contribution of Troops, Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, and Staff Officers and the Percentage of Women Peacekeepers

<i>December/Year</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total Contribution</i>	<i>% of Women</i>
2009	142	8,757	1.6
2010	137	8,691	1.5
2011	138	8,115	1.7
2012	133	7,839	1.6
2013	143	7,849	1.8
2014	137	8,139	1.6
2015	143	7,798	1.8
2016	40	7,710	0.5
2017	45	6,697	0.6
2018	47	6,445	0.7
2019	91	5,491	1.6
2020	98	5,425	1.8
2021	98	5,331	1.8

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping (n), 'Troop and Police Contributors,' <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

Specialised Training

India has also taken the lead in hosting specialised training courses for peacekeepers on sexual violence in armed conflict situations. The Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) based in Delhi has developed the course on Conflict Related Sexual Violence with the assistance of the Integrated Training Service of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, New York. It has been used regularly to conduct training both for its own peacekeepers before deployment as well as for the military personnel from other TCCs.

The CUNPK in Delhi has also been conducting training of female officers since 2015. It has developed a training course in partnership with UN Women, and has organised two weeks' workshops dedicated to training female officers from across the world. This course is meant to encourage prospective female peacekeepers, and to provide them with adequate skills. The first course was conducted from 19 March to 1 April 2015 in New Delhi, with a total of 41 participants from 25 different countries. The CUNPK conducted the 3rd UN Female Military Officers Course for 41 women military officers from 27 countries during the period 3–14 April 2017. The need for such a course has been felt because of the very low number of uniformed women peacekeepers deployed in peacekeeping missions. The course is designed to fulfil three aims. The first is to equip 'female military officers with the knowledge needed to enable them to be effective peacekeepers; the second is to increase the pool of trained female military officers with UN member states who could be made available to the UN for deployment to a UN mission at short notice; lastly, the course is a vehicle to promote the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy through the course participants'.⁵⁰ Such courses provide the participants an opportunity to train to be ready for deployment, network as well as share experiences and best practices.

Both the conflict-related sexual violence course and the female military officers' course have provided the Government of India a platform to show its commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security agendas of the UN.

CHALLENGES FACED BY UNIFORMED WOMEN PEACEKEEPERS

Despite the high importance accorded to the participation of uniformed women peacekeepers, they confront a series of challenges in the field. The uniformed women peacekeepers' specific traits such as compassion,

soft posture, and skills in engagement with the local community are highlighted at the cost of their professionalism and their other skills as military or police personnel. For instance, when a contingent commander wants to project a 'softer' posture to engage with the local community, he ensures that women are part of the patrol.⁵¹ This kind of practice restricts uniformed women peacekeepers' potential, and under-utilises their skills and capabilities. The traditional stereotypical notions of women among UN leaders in the field tend to conflate uniformed women peacekeepers with local women who need protection, and thus keep them at the base instead of being assigned active duties like their male colleagues.⁵² Even in the case of Indian FFPU in Liberia, although the discourse sought to challenge gender dichotomies and stereotypes, it still tended to construct women as naturally peaceful, compassionate, and willing and able to address the needs of other women and children.⁵³ Major Shobha Nair, who served as an Indian Military Observer in MONUC, emphatically stated that it is not a matter of men or women being better at certain tasks. She highlighted the need for the collective effort of both men and women peacekeepers for the accomplishment of mandated tasks.⁵⁴

Another major challenge is the disproportionate burden imposed on uniformed women peacekeepers to implement gender mainstreaming. Despite the training and sensitisation of a gendered mandate to the UN peacekeeping personnel, male peacekeepers seem to have a superficial understanding of gender, and regard the female peacekeepers as responsible for gender mainstreaming in the missions. Thus, instead of accepting it as the whole-of-the-mission's responsibility, the gendered division of labour and role segregation has been the practice in the operational field. It is essential to ensure that male peacekeepers receive appropriate training, and develop more empathetic attitudes to deal with issues regarding women and children, rather than expecting their women colleagues to take on the full responsibility of implementing gender mainstreaming.

Another major challenge for uniformed women peacekeepers is that too much is expected of them to promote the effectiveness of the mission. It creates additional burdens on the uniformed women peacekeepers and they are obliged to undertake, or volunteer for, tasks in the form of a second shift to prove their worthiness. Uniformed women are invariably involved in outreach programmes in the local community, and have to spend their energy and personal time to carry out such programmes. The second shift role of the uniformed women peacekeepers emerged

not because of the natural traits or instincts of women but because of the social expectations from women peacekeepers. These expectations actually perpetuate gender differences, and result in requiring uniformed women peacekeepers to do extra unpaid work in UN missions. Good examples of this are the Indian uniformed women peacekeepers in both Liberia and the DRC, who have engaged in the second shift role in outreach programmes in their respective areas of deployment.

Moreover, the uniformed women peacekeepers themselves are often confronted with the challenge of harassment and abuse within missions.⁵⁵ Some have highlighted the possibility of uniformed women peacekeepers facing the dangers of sexual harassment and exploitation both from local forces and their own colleagues.

Uniformed women peacekeepers are also confronted with the lack of women-specific equipment, accommodation, inadequate living conditions, and other facilities, which prevent the creation of a conducive working environment and hamper the full utilisation of their potential. At the UNSC, an Indian diplomat highlighted the need to identify and resolve the structural problems that prevent an increased number of uniformed women in the UN missions such as logistics, barracks facilities, and the lack of other basic physical infrastructure.⁵⁶

Uniformed women peacekeepers deployed in male-dominated mixed units are usually assigned supportive instead of direct impact roles. They are assigned stereotypical jobs such as desk work, medical service and other supporting tasks. However, when India deployed All-Female Formed Police Unit (FFPU) in Liberia, it was criticised for promoting gender segregation and the notion that uniformed women peacekeepers' primary function is to reach out to protect women and children.⁵⁷ This criticism has emanated from the global culture of viewing women's involvement in peacekeeping as "legitimate" or "appropriate" only when it comes in the form of women participating as a small minority in male-majority units, that is, mixed units.⁵⁸ This global culture has not considered the actual plight of uniformed women peacekeepers in such mixed units. It does not seem to know the societies in developing countries in which, despite the provision of equality in their constitutions, patriarchal system exists, and women are not allowed to interact with outsiders. India has its own domestic experience of having separate women police units, and women's police stations to deal with women and girls related issues in society.

Keeping in view the similarities of Indian society with societies in the conflict-affected countries, India deployed FFPU as an innovative

alternative mechanism to deploy women peacekeepers. India also found it a practical way of increasing its contribution of women peacekeepers. Instead of appreciating and adopting the practice in the UN system, India had been subjected to the criticism of encouraging gender segregation.

During an open debate on Women in Peacekeeping in the UN Security Council, the Indian diplomat criticised the UN for preferring mixed units. He said,

In order to achieve the increased targets under the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, we ought to encourage countries who are willing to contribute full women units. However, we notice that to accommodate those who cannot fulfil the all-women unit commitments, policy frameworks are being diluted to prefer mixed units over full women units. If this is the approach, how can we possibly achieve the targets that we set for increasing women participation in peacekeeping? Instead of supporting a policy of mixed units, we believe that all women units need to be incentivized to encourage greater participation.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The moral and political pressure finally led the UN Security Council to adopt Resolution 1325 in October 2000. Based on this Resolution, the UN has been attempting to increase the participation of uniformed women peacekeepers by setting up several numerical targets. Various reasons have been given for the need to increase the number of uniformed women peacekeepers, such as women having specific traits which enable them to excel at certain tasks, of being more sensitive to the needs and challenges of the civilians in general and women and children in particular, of local women and children confiding their problems more readily in female peacekeepers, their ability to build trust and confidence with local communities, their comparative practical advantage in carrying out certain activities, and serve as powerful inspiration and role models for local women and girls. However, these oft-cited rationales for the increase in participation of uniformed women peacekeepers are viewed from an instrumentalist perspective, thus neglecting the right-based equality component of the UN Resolution 1325. The dominance of the instrumentalist discourse denies the crucial need to challenge embedded stereotypical notions of women.

Despite efforts to increase the number of uniformed women peacekeepers, their participation in peacekeeping has been low. Some

authors have argued that TCCs/PCCs are reluctant to send female peacekeepers to conflict areas which are regarded as the risky operational environments. Some have argued that uniformed women peacekeepers are less likely to be deployed in the early stages of missions because new missions are associated with higher levels of operational uncertainty and risk. Some have pointed out that women's participation is hindered by a lack of awareness of the UN's deployment options for women as also biases in deployment selection by the authorities in TCCs/PCCs. Some have confused peacekeepers with mercenaries, and have insensitively suggested offering monetary incentives to TCCs/PCCs to encourage them to provide more women peacekeepers for UN missions. Others have argued that the low participation of uniformed women peacekeepers reflects the under-representation of women in their national security sectors.

Because of this perception, a great deal of attention has been diverted at the UN to the need for a National Action Plan in the TCCs/PCCs to increase the recruitment of women in the national security sectors to have sufficient uniformed women for UN deployment. Even developed countries, including the five permanent members of the UN Security Council who have achieved greater gender parity in their military and police sectors, have not contributed the required percentage of uniformed women peacekeepers for UN operations. Thus, the failure to meet the numerical targets of deploying uniformed women peacekeepers is not solely because of the low contribution by developing countries.

India has had a long tradition of deploying women in UN peacekeeping missions. Initially, women were deployed as a part of the medical unit of Indian contingents; but since the induction of women into the army in 1992, the Indian army has been contributing women military officers and Staff Officers to UN Missions. When the UN started deploying police personnel in UN missions to deal with law-and-order issues in intrastate conflicts, India has been deploying Indian women police officers as well.

The Indian military and policewomen peacekeepers have been playing an exemplary role in operational fields. Their performance shows that they were not confined only to the base; nor did they play just the supportive roles. They performed impactful roles, such as patrolling, gathering information, assistance in the conduct of investigations, training the local military and the police, and sensitising the local communities on gender issues. Their deployment in high-risk environments such as South

Sudan, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo has shattered the general perception that uniformed women peacekeepers are not being deployed in high-risk areas, or not being deployed where the need for the gender perspective is greatest.

India has made two unique contributions in sending uniformed women peacekeepers in the form of the FFPU in Liberia, and the FET in the DRC. India's deployment of the FFPU in the UN mission in Liberia has been hailed as an innovative alternative by engaging uniformed women peacekeepers. The performance of the FFPU for the 10-year period from 2007 to 2016 has been commended by various officials. However, in some quarters, this deployment was criticised for promoting gender segregation as well as promoting the notion that uniformed women peacekeepers' primary function is to protect women and children. This kind of criticism has emanated from the global culture of viewing women's involvement in peacekeeping as "legitimate" or "appropriate" only when it comes in the form of women participating as a small minority in male-majority units (that is, mixed units), without taking into account the reality of role assigned to the uniformed women peacekeepers in such units. This global culture seems to have no idea of societies in developing countries where, despite provision of equality in their constitutions, patriarchal system still exists, and women are not allowed to interact with outsiders. India has its own domestic experience of having separate women police units, women's police stations to deal with women and girls related issues in society. Keeping in view the similarities of Indian society with societies in conflict-affected countries, India deployed the FFPU as an innovative alternative mechanism. India found it a practical way of increasing its contribution of women peacekeepers, and addressing gender issues in conflict areas. Instead of appreciating and adopting the practice in the UN system, India has often been subjected to the criticism of encouraging gender segregation.

India has taken the lead in conducting both international and national specialised training courses on gender issues. Both the conflict-related sexual violence course and the female military officers' course have provided the Government of India with a show-case of its commitment to the Women, Peace and Security agenda of the United Nations.

Uniformed women peacekeepers, including Indian women peacekeepers, are confronted with a series of challenges, such as focussing on their specific traits at the cost of their professionalism, and other skills as military or police personnel. A disproportionate burden

is placed on them to implement gender mainstreaming, and too much is expected of them to promote the effectiveness of the mission. They are often obligated to undertake second shifts to prove their worthiness, and are also confronted with challenge of harassment and abuse within missions. Uniformed women peacekeepers are also confronted with the lack of women-specific equipment, accommodation, inadequate living conditions, and other facilities, thus depriving them of a conducive working environment, thereby hampering the full utilisation of their potential.

The most practical way of increasing the participation of uniformed women peacekeepers is to address the challenges they confront in the field, and establish an enabling environment for them. Another major reform required is to ensure that gender mainstreaming is the whole-of-the-mission's responsibility, requiring the commitment and involvement of even male peacekeepers. Last but not least, is the need to make a conscious effort to recognise and promote gender equality among all peacekeepers, and provide uniformed women peacekeepers full opportunities to utilise their professional skills and capabilities.

NOTES

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