

Employment of Women in Indian and Hungarian Armed Forces – A Comparative Study

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The establishment of armed forces has roots deep in history, times when the proportion in men in arms of any country was higher than that of women. Nowadays in most countries women have equal rights to participate in almost all the working sectors of any nation. However, the participation of women in the Indian Army was initiated in 1992 whereas it was founded in 1895. In the 19th century women got their place in defense forces with a limited quota to serve. This paper will deal with female recruitment issues in the armed forces of India and Hungary.

Keywords: women in military, India, Hungary, employment, reservation, NATO

“Those who always speak well of women do not know them enough; those who always speak ill of them do not know them at all...” [1: 157]

This article presents the first ideas and impressions on women in defense forces of two very different countries. As a Ph.D. student of the Faculty of Military Science and Officer Education of the National University of Public Service it is the author’s aim to develop it into a full thesis in the years to come. As the introduction of a comparative study addressing gender issues it sets the scene for international comparative research of a much larger scale based on the analysis of multiple factors.

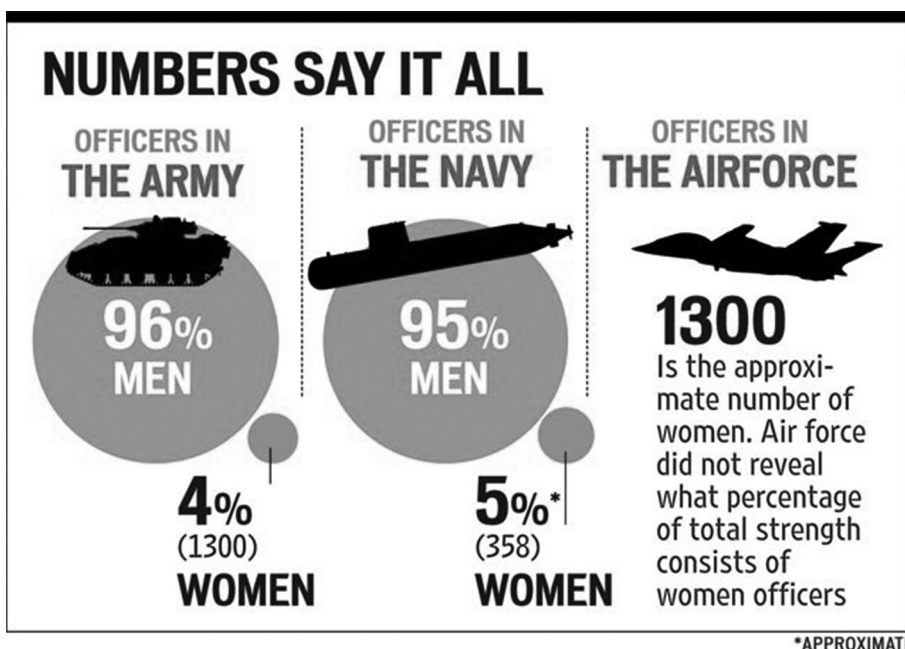
Two Militaries, Two Practices

In the past centuries the role of women in certain professions was often limited by male dominating societies, but slowly and gradually women have earned their space in nearly all walks of life. Perhaps there is no area which has been more resistant to the full participation of women than the military. Here, as in no other profession, long-standing ideas about the traits and abilities of the two genders have kept the military predominantly male and male controlled until well into the 1900s. [1: 157] The introduction of female officers to the Indian Army was approved in 1992 by the Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs as short service commission cadre. The first batch consisted of 25 female officers who were commissioned into the Army Service Corps (ASC), the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC), the Army Education Corps (AEC) and the Judge Advocate General (JAG) departments in March 1993. The initial terms of engagement for female officers in the Indian Armed Forces (IAF) was five years, which got extended to ten years over the period of time, with the option of

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extension by another four years in the service. Permanent commission of female officers was granted in 2008 to work in the AEC and JAG departments. [2] In Hungary, it was in the mid-1990s that real career opportunities were opened for servicewomen. Since Hungary abolished compulsory military service in 2004, an increased interest in military service can be observed. Despite the increase of the number of women in armed forces their contributions are not very publicized and rewarded. In Hungarian Defense Forces (HDF) women served first as nurses, but today women participate in different branches of the HDF. [1: 157]

The number of vacancies as announced by the Government for the 99th Short Service Commission Course (for men) is 175, and for the 13th Short Service Commission Women (Non-Technical) Course is only 12. [5] Although female officers were first introduced to the Indian Army in 1993, their percentage in 2015 is still not significant as they comprise just 4% of the officer corps of the Indian Army and only just 5% of the Indian Navy. [6]



Picture 1. Female Officers strength in Indian Armed Forces. [6]

In comparison with other NATO countries, the HDF have a relatively high proportion of professional female soldiers in many fields. The total percentage of female professional and contracted soldiers (19.6%) covers even higher rates in some ranks. Although there are still no female flag officers, women serve in every other officer rank. Despite the continuous downsizing of the HDF the military ratio of servicewomen, especially among NCO's (*non-commissioned officer*) is still on the rise. [1: 87] [1: 158] [3] Among junior officers the rate of females is over 20%, among contracted personnel it is even higher. Every second officer from OF-2 (Officers [OF 1-10]) and every third of OF-1 is now female. This shows that besides professional military education, highly educated civilian females tend to join the army and accept the special circumstances of living in uniform. Even if their majority is

in so-called special positions with rather slow and defined advance, many of them might be promoted to higher officer ranks in 5–10 years, if it is possible to keep them in service. [4] Combat positions are also open for women in the HDF forces since 1996. There are no regulations, nor confirmations concerning allowed or forbidden branches and services for servicewomen. [4]

Table 1. Female Personal Strength in Hungary 2008. [4]

Hungary	Total %	Flag Officer
Joint Force Command (JFC)	15.7	–
Ministry of Defense (MoD)	33.7	–
Defense Staff Units	29.7	–
Total	20.2	–

According to the HDF Budget Management Information System, as of November, 2015, the proportion of women in the Land Forces was 18%, in the Air Force 22%, for the Ministry and the HDF Joint Force Command 33%, at the background institutions of the MoD and at the direct MoD subordinate organizations 36%, Hungarian Defense Forces Health Centre 73%.

Major Employment Challenges

The Delhi High Court announced it would not allow “*sexist bias*” to block women’s progress. Female officers in the IAF were not entitled to a pension as a minimum 20 years of service was required. However, on 5th September, 2015 a landmark judgment at the Delhi High Court announced women to be granted with permanent commission in the Navy, ensuring that female naval officers enjoy rights similar to their male counterparts in the Army and the Air Force. Female naval officers were not eligible for pension, since it required a minimum of 20 years of service. The petitions were filed by a group of female officers, both retired and serving, from the logistics, education and air traffic control departments of the Navy. [7]

Hungary participates in NATO missions, in which all positions are open to women. Yet most servicewomen serve in medical, public information, communication, administration or logistic roles, and only a few of them serve in infantry squads or other combat positions. The participation of Hungarian female soldiers in multinational operations is successful. There are officers, NCO’s and contracts in every mission the HDF participates in. They have to meet the same requirements, and live under the same conditions as men. [1: 165] In contrast the bulk of the Indian Army is deployed in rugged areas of the country. The posts are isolated and basic facilities are not available for months and operational tasking warrant working in close proximity with men. There are roughly a dozen nations that have opened *close combat roles* to women; however, it has taken them a decade to go through the process of integration. In the Indian context, induction of women in combat arms can be considered in a graduated manner, provided they meet the desired physical and professional standards. In the training academy, female officer candidates volunteering to join the combat arms need to pass the same tests as are applicable to male cadets to be posted to the combat arms as young officers. [2] In the HDF the main motivation of servicemen and women are the financials benefits, because the difference between the peacetime salary and salary in missions is significant.

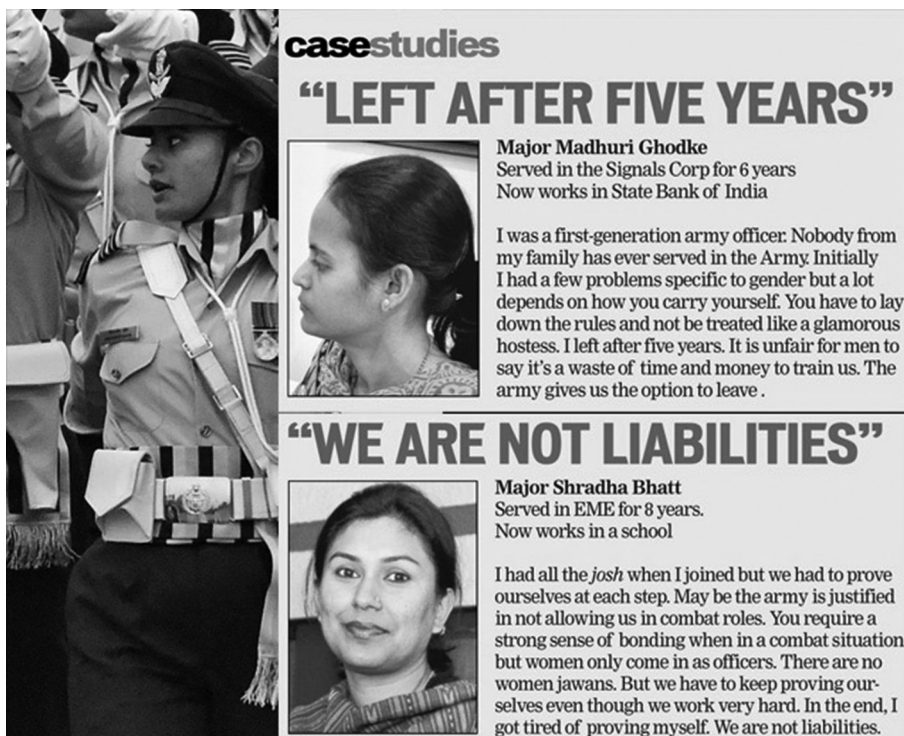
Secondary motivation is the evaluation system as it is seen an advantage to have mission experiences gained abroad. [1]

A recent research project titled “*Women Officers in Indian Army and Work Environment: Indian Perspective*” surveyed 600 seniors, juniors, peers, subordinates, women officers and parents. A mixed response was found to the question of whether women officers were willing to lead male troops on a patrol or an ambush. It was noted that female officers with lower age in the service group of one to four years felt thrilled, considering it an adventure activity. Married female officers in the service group of five to eight years considered this out of context and felt nervous and bewildered at the thought of a single woman amongst male soldiers. Some senior officers were evasive and non-committal while the majority were not in favor of sending female officers on night duty or on ambush and convoy protection duties in counter-insurgency areas. Hungarian Armed forces physical fitness is tested for all personnel annually. Each soldier must meet those requirements in order to be suitable for further military service. The fitness test consists of the same elements (3200 m running, push-ups, sit-ups), but differs by gender and age. [8] [10]

Steps were taken to build up the family support system. If married couples with children serve in the army, and one of them is on a mission abroad, the other family member with child younger than six years old is exempt from 24 hours duty. The army adopted the civilian law on maternal leave, according to which servicewomen are entitled to six months of maternity leave. After this period they can be assigned to personnel reserve status for one more year. [1: 166]

In the Indian Army due to certain social and domestic obligations and physical constraint, military service poses a greater challenge for female officers in comparison to their male counterparts. Their role as wife and/or mother adversely affects their availability to the organization, more so at sub-unit level, where the deficiency of officers is maximum. Maternity leave of 180 days, 60 days each of annual leave and furlough deny a unit of an officer for 10 months with no relief forthcoming. [2] With women forming nearly half of the Indian population, there is a mandated requirement to ensure their proportionate representation in the Services in a graduated manner, keeping the exigencies of the respective Service in mind. With a focus of war-fighting shifting from contact to more technologically advanced battles, proliferated with sophisticated platforms and non-contact standoff operations in the realm of cyber, space, intelligence and perception management, adequate avenues increasingly exist for the employment of women in the Indian Army. [2]

Though most developed countries have female officers commanding certain non-combat units, women are also enrolled in all ranks. In the Indian context, the prevailing service conditions, socio-cultural mind sets, limited command experience and employment of women only as officers has precluded assignments of command responsibilities to female officers. [2] If one compares women in the Indian Navy with women in the Royal British Navy the differences become visible. In the latter 71% of jobs are open for women in the logistics and warfare branches. Women are commanding or executive officers of various vessels such as mine-hunters and frigates. Sixteen women qualified as principal warfare officers, six as pilots and 22 as observers. Approximately 1200 women serve in a selection of 57 ships in all ranks and rates. A further 130 are serving in other operational or sea-going posts with the remaining being shore-based or under training. [9] There are also females commanding reserve forces units. Servicewomen also fill a variety of roles in operational theatres including Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans.



case studies

“LEFT AFTER FIVE YEARS”

Major Madhuri Ghodke
Served in the Signals Corp for 6 years
Now works in State Bank of India

I was a first-generation army officer: Nobody from my family has ever served in the Army. Initially I had a few problems specific to gender but a lot depends on how you carry yourself. You have to lay down the rules and not be treated like a glamorous hostess. I left after five years. It is unfair for men to say it's a waste of time and money to train us. The army gives us the option to leave.

“WE ARE NOT LIABILITIES”

Major Shradha Bhatt
Served in EME for 8 years.
Now works in a school

I had all the *josh* when I joined but we had to prove ourselves at each step. May be the army is justified in not allowing us in combat roles. You require a strong sense of bonding when in a combat situation but women only come in as officers. There are no women jawans. But we have to keep proving ourselves even though we work very hard. In the end, I got tired of proving myself. We are not liabilities.

Picture 2. Two Typical Cases. [6]

Recently in the Indian Air Force women were allowed to apply for the fighter pilot position. Due to cultural biases and preconception the reaction of male Indians to this opportunity was not highly positive. People of the nation do not believe in the capacity of female officers in the IAF as the troops will not accept a female officer as their leader because of the cultural barriers about women.

Conclusion

Do You Have It in You? The army recruitment information pamphlets with this line fills the aspirants with high morale but it is time female officers asked themselves *If They Have It in Them?*

Unlike in Hungary, the resolution of possible conflicts in India requires a bilateral compromise, since the women have to be part of it with empathy and in a positive way in order to resolve the organizational conflicts which represent masculine values. The measure of the acceptance of women is possible only on the basis of equal performance and treatment. In other words women rightfully expect objective evaluation on the basis of their performance, but they must then accept the results of it. [1: 166]

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