



INDIA'S GENDER - RESPONSIVE PEACEKEEPING

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ABSTRACT:

India is the country where a United Nations peacekeeping operation is a core part of India's foreign policy and a tool of soft power diplomacy. India has over the decades shown its unwavering commitment to global peace, contributing more than 290,000 troops in 50 UN missions.

This participation not only underscores India's commitment to global peace but also functions as a tool of India's soft power that projects it as a responsible and humanitarian global leader.

Peacekeeping is more effective when it considers the different ways that women, men, boys, and girls are affected by conflict. To achieve this, we need to employ and empower more women as peacekeepers, as well as ensure women in conflict zones are protected from harm, can safely access justice and services, and have a say in the decisions that impact them.

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INTRODUCTION

The quality and nature of leadership has a major effect on the success of UN peace operations and is key to the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping. Mission leaders set the strategic vision to implement mission mandates, they identify priorities that enable various mission components to conduct operational activities, and they foster organizational culture and oversee human resources. When peacekeeping efforts take into account the unique needs, contributions, and perspectives of all people, they better protect local communities. This diversity in thinking about long-standing problems leads to more innovative and durable solutions to conflict.

The Indian UN operations, gender-responsiveness is required by leadership to not only realize the Women, Peace and Security agenda and foster more gender-equal operating environments for people serving in missions, but also to strengthen the ability of missions to implement their mandates and address gendered conflict dynamics in their areas of operation more effectively. Yet, without a common understanding of what is meant by or expected in terms of 'gender-responsive leadership' in peace

operations, gaps in operational implementation will continue to remain.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1- To Identify and promote pre-deployment and in-mission gender training in equality.
- 2- To analyse the gender diverse peacekeeping are more capable of accessing information.
- 3- To explore the Gender - Responsive Leadership in UN Peace Operations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study framing Gender-responsive peacekeeping is a UN approach that integrates gender perspectives into all aspects of peace operations to address the distinct needs of women, men, girls, and boys.

1- LITERATURE REVIEW: The foundation of this study was built upon an extensive literature review of academic books, journal articles, official documents, and credible online sources.

2- HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: A historical analysis was

employed to trace the chronological development of gender-responsive addresses gender-based barriers and respects gender differences.

3- Content Analysis: Content analysis was utilized to ensuring security institutions are accountable, equitable, and effective.

4- SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS: The findings from the literature review, historical analysis, and content analysis were synthesized to identify the gender-sensitive approach implies recognising that peace building, state building and conflict are 'gendered' processes in two senses: men and women are affected differently by conflict, and gender roles shape state building outcomes.

2. THE IDEA AND OVERVIEW OF INDIA'S UN PEACEKEEPING LEADERSHIP

The idea of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The world is one family) of India is reflected in India's participation in UN peacekeeping, which goes beyond troop contribution and has become a diplomatic outreach strategy that signifies India as a country devoted to humanitarianism, international stability and collective peace building to serve humanity.

India has always focused deeply on the interests of the Global South and values of equitable development and security. India harnesses global south solidarity through not only training peacekeepers from other developing nations and providing capacity-building programmes but also actively engaging with peacekeeping missions in global south countries.

India performed very well, and its performance has been characterised by the number of peacekeepers, commitment and operational discipline of peacekeepers. Over the past 70 years, India has participated in more than 50 peacekeeping missions.

3. INDIA'S GENDER DIPLOMACY IN UN PEACEKEEPING MISSION

India's pioneering role in deploying women peacekeepers is amongst the most compelling aspects of India's peacekeeping endeavours. The deployment of Indian women troops for peacekeeping missions has transformed the image of security forces and has a direct impact on women, children and other people in the conflict-affected areas. Indian women have been part of the UN missions since the 1960s with Congo being the first mission where they served as medical personnel in operational role.

India, with the idea of Viksit Bharat, has equally contributed to gender parity in UN peacekeeping missions. This idea has focused on the alignment with the frameworks of UNSC Resolution 1325. India, which was the first country to deploy an all-women Formed Police Unit to Liberia in the year 2007, showcases India's gender inclusivity.

By the year 2024, India had more than 150 women peacekeepers deployed across more than 6 active missions, including MONUSCO, UNMISS, UNIFIL, Western

Sahara, and Golan Heights. The United Nations under Secretary General for peace operations highlighted the strategic value of Indian women peacekeepers. At "Women Peacekeepers of the Global South" in February 2025 in New Delhi. President Draupadi Murmu mentioned that "missions with a higher presence of females have led to more effective violence reduction and sustainable peace-related outcomes."

4. CONCEPT OF INDIA AND IT'S ENGAGEMENT IN UN PEACEKEEPING

India, a country that has adhered to the principles of Dharma and Ahimsa since its inception, upholds its multilateral tenets of non-violence. The country has pursued peace and the concept of non-violence since the time of Ashoka, even before. India has consistently prioritised the idea of global peace and stability. This idea of Neutrality, along with the concept of Dharma, has been reflected in its engagement in peacekeeping. This engagement is not merely strategic, but it holds more meaning. Along with strategy, there is a philosophical thought behind the idea of peacekeeping operations by India, which is "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam".

India, with more than 265,000 personnel, has served more than 49 missions since its independence, remaining one of the largest contributors to the United Nations peacekeeping. India has been an active participant in various missions carried out by the United Nations, with its peacemaking and logistical capacity in terms of battalions. India supports the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in the Golan Heights. Under UNIFIL, India sends an infantry battalion group to Lebanon. Furthermore, Indian officers serve as military observers and staff in Cyprus under the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus and also play a key role in MONUSCO. All these deployments show India's commitment to global peacekeeping.

5. WOMENS EMPOWERMENT WITH PEACEKEEPING

Women peacekeepers contribute in preventing and responding to gender-based violence, providing support and protection to survivors. Their presence and actions demonstrate the importance of gender diversity in creating sustainable peace and security" highlighted Raksha Rajya Mantri Shri Sanjay Seth while delivering the valedictory address at the conference on 'Women in Peacekeeping - A Global South Perspective' in New Delhi on February 25, 2025. The Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in India organised a two-day conference which united women peacekeepers from India and 35 other countries to examine the changing role of women in peacekeeping and collaborate on strategies to enhance their participation in the challenging missions.

Raksha Rajya Mantri emphasised on the fact that India is a proud partner in peace keeping operations, having deployed more than 2.9 lakh troops over seven decades in more than 50 UN Peacekeeping Missions. "As one of the largest troop contributors, we recognise that peacekeeping

is not just about deploying forces but about strengthening capacities, enhancing preparedness and ensuring a people-centric, culturally sensitive and inclusive approach to conflict resolution," he added. He highlighted that participation of women peacekeepers fosters an inclusive approach to peacekeeping, ensuring that the unique needs of women and children are addressed in conflict-affected areas.

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence in conflict areas—accounting for 95 per cent of the cases that are reported. As primary caretakers and food producers in their families, women are especially affected by forced displacement, food insecurity, restricted access to jobs and education, and attacks on healthcare infrastructure, including sexual and reproductive care.

Unfortunately, not only is the number of armed conflicts around the world rising, but the proportion of women killed in these zones doubled between 2022 and 2023.

Equal and inclusive peacekeeping contributes to lasting peace. The barriers to women's leadership in peace efforts are persistent and addressing them requires multiple and sustained actions.

6. INDIA'S PERFORMANCE IN MISSION

Rajya Mantri reiterated the vision of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi that India has articulated its global engagement through five guiding principles: Respect, Dialogue, Cooperation, Peace & Prosperity. He underlined that these principles have reflected nation's commitment to foster a world order that is just, balanced and representative of the aspirations of all nations. "Our priorities must be human-centric, multi-dimensional and sustainable, ensuring that growth is inclusive, equitable and environmentally conscious," he added.

At the end of the conference, Shri Sanjay Seth felicitated and interacted with women peacekeepers for their exceptional contributions and dedication to global peace and security. He stated that they also serve as role models, challenge traditional gender norms and inspire local women to take on leadership roles.

India performed very well, and its performance has been characterised by the number of peacekeepers, commitment and operational discipline of peacekeepers. Over the past 70 years, India has participated in more than 50 peacekeeping missions. The contribution and development have spread across the globe, including Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Balkans. India's peacekeeping has been very impactful in conflict-prone African states. For instance, in Congo, the Indian peacekeepers helped stabilise the Ituri region in the mission MONUSCO, and India has currently deployed around 900 troops to Lebanon in the mission UNIFIL.

Training of whom, mention has also been integrated as part of India's peacekeeping ambition under the Viksit Bharat Mission relating to peacekeeping. The mentioned centre trains more than 85 foreign contingents, including areas of cyber security and humanitarian law, with the

help of simulation-based training. At the strategic level, India's performance has been transformed into a "Strategic tool of Soft Power", troops welcomed by host nations for cultural sensitivity, adaptability to their language, and their dedication to win the trust, which has been proven in areas such as Abyei (UNISFA) and Western Sahara (MINURSO). With the constraints on resources, commitment remains hard towards its duty to establish peace across the globe.

7. CHALLENGES AND ISSUE

India's success at UN missions serves as a benchmark for various nations, but it also presents several challenges. Indian peacekeepers contributed to many missions across the globe, but they had inadequate representation in decision-making in terms of command hierarchy. With technology and the significant role of non-state actors, the nature of the conflict is changing aggressively. These modern conflict zones now do not follow the traditional line but asymmetric warfare, terrorist organisations with drones and cyber capabilities, which make it difficult to operate in new conflict zones due to resource constraints in certain geographical areas.

The cost of the financial operation and chances of misconduct by the peacekeepers of any origin can also hamper India's longstanding reputation as a mandated peacekeeping country. Another challenge is the underutilisation of the peacekeepers, especially of women peacekeepers, despite their leadership skills. The scale of deployment of Indian women peacekeepers remains limited in comparison to that of male peacekeepers.

8. IMPACT

The impact India has created in conflict-affected areas has been multidimensional, starting from India's diplomatic and soft power gain, where India's image has been significantly enhanced and its credentials of peacekeeping, also with a strong image of "Peacebuilder" and as a leading voice for the Global South, supporting India's campaign for permanent membership at the UNSC. With the inclusion of women peacekeepers in deployment in ongoing missions, these women in uniform broke the old gender norms while inspiring the recruitment of more women peacekeepers, which led to women's empowerment.

With all these efforts and establishing a training centre at New Delhi, impacting the globe with hybrid knowledge regarding peacekeeping, Initiatives like UN C4ISR Academy for Peace Operations, where Indian experts played a very crucial role, at the same time India with its diverse, rich and traditional knowledge like yoga and meditations leveraged these practices in conflict zones with the blend of soft power.

As these conflict zones have turned into asymmetric conflict zones, expanding their technological aspiration with the use of AI, satellite communication and predictive analytics, where joint programs with respect to Research and Development will be helpful.

India should also include more women peacekeepers, not

only as troops but as supporting roles, setting quantifiable targets for them in both leadership and non-leadership roles. At the same time, India should focus on the Indic Solution for the peace and stability of the missions. India, as a leader in peacekeeping, should advocate for the structural reforms and equal rights of representation and decision-making. Advocating for South-South cooperation.

9. CONCLUSION

The Indian government has proclaimed itself to be a leader on gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping. However, if the gender-mainstreaming norm bundle is unpacked, we see evidence of Indian norm localization and contestation. India's localization of the gender mainstreaming norm has entailed the pursuit of an asymmetric gender-parity approach between different branches of the security forces, with the police overall more accommodating to female personnel. Within the police corps, there persists however a gendered division of labour, which makes it impossible for women to shift gender binaries and undermines the possibility of gender equality. Moreover, the Indian norm localization of 'gender' is widely equated with 'women' which entails that the burden of gender mainstreaming falls on women only. In terms of norm contestation, India contests the idea of placing women in combat or high-risk situations due to predominant socio-political perception of women as devoid of the agency to ensure their own protection.

The impact of Indian women participating in UN peacekeeping missions on gender dynamics within peacekeeping operations and local populations is noteworthy. Especially in the UNMIL (United Nations Missions in Liberia) had been effect more than their local governance policies. The role of the Indian Formed Police Unit (IFPU) made a history in Liberia's peace established. According to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberian Foreign President), "the contribution you have made in inspiring Liberian women, imparting in them the spirit of professionalism and encouraging them to join operations that protect the nation; for that we will always be grateful". Todays, Liberian security service women participation increased from 1% to 17% (2018). Liberian women participation in all public sectors has been increasing; it happened because of Indian women peacekeepers.

India is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions, and its participation goes beyond military operations and conforms to the nation's historic legacy of embracing the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam while upholding humanitarian values and working to promote global peace. India's active participation in peacekeeping missions has enhanced its soft power along with the global south as well as the developed western countries. The participation of Indian women in UN peacekeeping missions and the recent organisation of the Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South in New Delhi symbolises India's stand on the empowerment and inclusion of women in building a just, secure and peaceful world.

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