



PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN UNITED NATION PEACEKEEPING FORCES

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Abstract

This paper critically analyzes the participation of women in power management and decision making in Global Politics. Gender equality is a significant issue in Global Politics of the 21st century. This paper particularly focuses on women's role in UN peacekeeping forces in post-conflict, war-crime zones. It is the women who are subjected to sexual violence, forced prostitution, trafficking and abduction during war-crimes. Since UNO is responsible for upholding peace and security through peacekeeping missions, inclusion of women is necessary to maintain stability and peace in post-conflict zones.

Keyword: *Gender equality, United Nations, peacekeeping force, civil war, human rights and peace.*

BACKGROUND

Women accounts for almost half of the world's population. However, since time immemorial women across the globe have been subject to various kinds of discrimination, oppression, and inequality. There have been many evidences of women being subjugated by men across African, European, and Middle Eastern countries during the ancient and medieval era. In the Greek and Roman societies, women are even limited to enjoy their democratic rights. They were barred from owning any property and also their political participation were restricted. In addition to this, women's movements were even kept in check. Surprisingly, even today they are rarely allowed to leave their houses on their own (Napikoski, 2020). However in Indian society, women were given full freedom and proffered supreme authority during the Vedic and post-Vedic ages. They were treated as "Ardhanginis" in every family. They enjoyed equal freedom as men. They were free to choose their life partner, remarry, and even pursue their education and went through 'Brahmacharya' discipline and 'Upanayana' discipline as men. Moreover, women were given full economic independence in the ancient Indian society. They were even allowed to engage into occupations like teaching, spinning, weaving, and into agriculture. But, in spite of that their rights were limited in inheriting property (Shuani, 2022).

Nevertheless with time passing by, the societies started to impose checks on women's freedom and identity. Many cultures and religions used oppression as a tool to gain control on sexual powers as it is believed that it is the authority gained by all the men to maintain the purity of their own race and establish their powers over women. During the medieval era, the status of women deteriorated to much extent. In a nutshell, women were significantly controlled by men of their families and even dependent on men in all matters of their lives. Most importantly, all of them lacked financial independence. Surprisingly, these curtailments existed until very recently in many progressive European societies (Daileader, 2020). In Islamic states, the condition of women was far worse in terms of enjoying their rights and freedom. During the sultanate period, women were treated as the sole property of their husbands and women belonging from royal background were obliged to observe purdah and were rarely allowed to go outside. The one of the rulers of Tughlaq Dynasty, Firuz Shah Tughlaq believed that women might get involved into immoral activities if they are allowed to step out of their houses and so restricted women to even visit holy shrines. Even in Hindu kingdoms, many Rajput leaders sought to have killed their wives and their harems (slave girls) after being defeated in wars for the sake



of securing their honour. Since then, women were treated as an icon of wealth in the society. During wars, women from the defeated enemy were distributed to the triumphant army as war booty. In addition to this, several practices like Sati pratha, and Baal Vivah (Child marriages) were quite prominent in the Indian society since medieval era. However, women belonging to nobility enjoyed few freedoms like pursuing education, dancing, and singing along with practicing few sporting activities like swordplay, horse riding, etc.. Moreover, there are many commendable women rulers like Rani Manikarnika, Razia Sultana, and Ahilyabai Holkar who made a mark in the Indian history for their bravery and ruled their kingdoms as magnificently as any other men ruler (Dawn, 2022).

In the present times, women have made a space of their own and are still struggling to make an identity throughout the world. Even today in many Asian and African societies, women are denied their right to access education, healthcare facilities, employment opportunities, and political participation. As per the studies conducted by the United Nations, women accounts for more than two-third of the total world's illiterate population. Around 80 percent of the world's total refugee population are women, and women own only 1 per cent of the world's resource and earn a small part (1/10th) of the world's income. In general, women all over the world face some form of domination, humiliation and identity crisis in all fields. Starting from family level, women's opinions have little to no weight, and men are the sole in-charge of all decisions. Majority of women suffer from malnutrition, poverty and poor health. In spite of this, there have been witnessed some progressive changes since the Second World War in empowering women worldwide. The period of 1960s and 1970s observed women coming out of their houses for meeting economic necessities in the United States of America. This marked the development in the status of women in society. Followed by this, women further started participating in politics in masses and formed organisations like the National Organization for Women (NOW). As a matter of fact, in Nordic countries, women started occupying significant positions in political offices. Accordingly, women's voices are recognised and well-heard at every level, starting from running a family to governing a nation (Srivastava, 2019). Even in a developing country like India, women like Indira Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj, Sonia Gandhi, and Jayalalitha worked hard to change the past oppressive dynamics of the country with their skills and judgements.

Women's Movement: Empowerment

The period of 19th century and early 20th century witnessed the 'first wave of feminism' in the US that focussed on the legal rights of women, particularly the right to vote. During the 1960s and 1970s, women in the US fought for equal rights and opportunities, and greater personnel freedom which later came to be known as the 'second wave of feminism', popularly regarded as the "women's liberation movement". It basically focussed on the overall experience of women in every field including politics, work, family and sexuality (Burkett, 2022).

After the Second World War, the conditions of women in developed countries changed drastically. Women's lives were not restricted to household chores but with the growth of service sectors it opened several employment opportunities for women as well. Though this improved their socio-economic status of women in the society, but they still suffered a lot in terms of cultural attitudes and legal precedents. One of the most notable works by the French author Simone de Beauvoir, the *Second Sex* (French: *Le Deuxième Sexe*) was published in the year 1949. This book raised feminist consciousness by stressing that liberation for women was liberation for men too. Another remarkable work by Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963 is considered to be the first public indication that change was approaching. In her book, Betty discussed about the problem that 'lay buried, unspoken' in



the mind of the suburban housewife. Betty spoke about how these women are socially conditioned to recognize their own desperation. This book impacted the lives of huge masses of women and encouraged them to come out for the four walls and join the government as leaders and representatives. They fought for equal pay for equal work pointing towards the issues of discrimination faced by women in workplace based on gender. As a result of this, the National Organisation for Women (NOW), a national pressure group was formed in 1966. Though the organisation could not make it to the success list in the initial days, by the year 1967 it slowly started to progress (Burkett, 2022).

The feminist movement formally began in 1848 across the globe, which was a series of political campaigns for reforms against issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, and maternity leave, equal pay for equal work, women's suffrage, sexual harassment and sexual violence. The fight for these rights varied from nation to nation and even from communities to communities based on the type of suppression women faced globally (Lumen, 2022).

Around the western corner, the feminist movement has gone through three waves- the first wave of feminism began in the 19th and early 20th century which focused on the legal rights, primarily on achieving women's suffrage. The first wave observed a remarkable link between slavery abolition movement and the women's rights movement. Frederick Douglas played an instrumental role in both of these movements and she sternly believed that in order to attain equality both- men and women should work together. The second wave of feminism though thought to begin in the US in 1960s but later on spread to the other western countries as well. This one drew attention towards marital rape issues and domestic violence, establishment of rape crisis and battered women's shelters, and changes in custody and divorce law. Further in 1960, the Food and Drug Administration accepted the combined oral contraceptive pills, which were made available in 1961. The third wave of feminism took shape in the early 1990s and the struggle is still continuing till present. It arose partially as a response to the failures of and backlashes faced against the second wave of feminism during the 1960w, '70s and '80s (Lumen, 2022).

Women in UN Peacekeeping Forces

Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)- 1979 and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, also known as UN Women- 2010 are the major initiatives taken by UN for the women across the world.

United Nation's peace and security work is founded by the peacekeeping forces and through decades women's participation has justifiably added success to it. Only 1 per cent of the deployed uniformed personnel were women back in the year 1993. In 2020, out of ninety-five thousand peacekeepers approximately, women add up to 4.8 per cent of military squadrons, 10.9 per cent of formed police units and 34 per cent of justice and corrections government-provided personnel in UN peacekeeping forces. The Security Council directed the United Nations Peacekeeping operations in order to implement the Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security across all peace activities. The first resolution by the Security Council known as Resolution 1325 (2000) acknowledged the inordinate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls, and recognized the contributions women and girls make in dispute or conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace building. Further, it highlighted the significance of equal and full participation of women and girls as active agents in peace and security. The nine consecutive resolutions on Women, Peace and Security viz. 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467 and 2493 that have been adopted since then,



emphasizes upon the importance of women's leadership and meaningful participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, addressing the impact of sexual violence, promoting the development and use of measures and standards for monitoring the administration of women, peace and security mandates. Moreover, the resolutions also put emphasis on training and capacity building on gender equality, engaging with civil society more comprehensively and enabling an improved understanding of gender dynamics of conflict. The implementation of Women Peace and Security (WPS) priorities is a political commitment in the Secretary General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative claims that women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes and political solutions is essential for effective peacekeeping.

Role of Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Forces

Since 1948, the UN peacekeeping forces have developed and are presently involved in various range of task, from its traditional role of monitoring ceasefire agreements and borders to carrying out wide-ranging multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations in some of the world's most dangerous corners. Deployment of women as peacekeeping forces is one of the most contemplative steps taken by the UN. The overall peacekeeping performance has improved too much extent after the admission of women as peacekeepers. The deployment of women peacekeepers have not only provided greater access to different communities in the world but also helped in promoting human rights and protection of civilians. It has further encouraged more women to come forward to be a part of peace and political processes. The involvement of women as peacekeepers have led to a greater diversity and an extensive skillset to boost decision making, planning and results, leading to greater operational effectiveness and performance. Thus, their participation upgrades operations and performance. In addition to this, women as peacekeepers have better access to population, including women and children. For instance, by interrogating and supporting survivors of gender-based violence and violence against children, ensuing to generate critical information that would otherwise be difficult to reach. Furthermore, Heterogeneity in United Nations peacekeepers made engagement with all members of the communities possible. The involvement of women peacekeepers is crucial to build trust and confidence with local communities and help improving access and support for local women. For instance, by interacting with women in Afghanistan, their outlook and problems faced by them are loudly voiced. Their participation even helped to prevent and reduce conflict and confrontation. Diversity in UN peacekeeping aids to address the disproportionately negative effect that war zones has on the livelihood of women and children and bring new perspectives and solutions to the table by effectively addressing the wants of women in conflict and post-conflict settings, including those of women ex-combatants and child soldiers during the process of demobilizing and reintegration into civilian life. Lastly, women peacekeepers acts as powerful mentors and role models for women and girls in post-conflict settings in the host community, setting examples for them to advocate for their own rights and pursue non- traditional careers (UN Peacekeeping, 2022).

Conclusion

Though the percentage of participation of women in UN peacekeeping forces is quite disappointing, however their impact is quite impressive and highly sound. It has been witnessed that during war zones women and children suffer the most. Women and girl child are the most vulnerable and are exploited in numerous ways from rapes, forced marriages, forced impregnation, indentured labour, and sexual servitude to the intentional spread of HIV/AIDS. Women in blue helmets have made a significant mark in saving this community from violence and rehabilitating them. They are responsible for making peace and choices, to possess critical perspectives on their situations and to organize collectively in response



to those situations. To sum up, women's participation as peacekeepers have greatly impacted to improve the conflict-based situation. The need of the hour is to accommodate more number of women as peacekeepers in order to bring stability and peace in such crisis situations.

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