UNITED NATIONS: ROLE IN INDIA

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Abstract:

The United Nations (UN), established in 1945, has played an integral role in global peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and socio-economic development. For India, one of the founding members of the UN, the organization has been both a platform for global engagement and a partner in national development. This paper explores the multidimensional relationship between India and the United Nations, focusing on India's contribution to UN peacekeeping, its role in policy formulation, and the UN's impact on India's development through specialized agencies. The study also examines India's aspirations for greater representation in the UN system and evaluates the challenges and prospects of this evolving partnership.

1. Introduction:

The United Nations (UN) was established in 1945 in the aftermath of World War II to promote peace, security, and cooperation among nations. As one of the founding members, India has maintained an active and constructive relationship with the organization. Even before gaining independence in 1947, India, under British rule, was a signatory to the **United Nations Charter**, reflecting its early commitment to multilateralism and global peace. Over the decades, India's engagement with the UN has evolved across various dimensions — political, economic, social, and humanitarian. The UN has supported India's nation-building efforts through its specialized agencies such as the **UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, FAO, and UNESCO**, while India has contributed significantly to peacekeeping, human rights initiatives, and sustainable development programs worldwide. This paper explores the historical context, key areas of collaboration, and the ongoing relevance of the UN's role in India's national and global policy framework.

2. Historical Background of India–UN Relations:

1. India as a Founding Member:

India was among the original 51 members who signed the UN Charter on **June 26, 1945**. Its early participation symbolized its aspiration for global cooperation and peace, even before achieving full sovereignty.

Following independence in 1947, India actively participated in major UN deliberations, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Indian delegate **Hansa Mehta** made a historic

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contribution by advocating the inclusion of the phrase "human beings" instead of "men" in Article 1, emphasizing gender equality.

2. **India and the UN During the Cold War:**

During the Cold War, India's policy of **non-alignment** positioned it as a moral voice within the UN system. It consistently advocated for decolonization, disarmament, and equitable economic development. India supported the creation of the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** and the **Group of 77 (G-77)** to promote the interests of developing nations. India also used the UN platform to highlight issues such as apartheid in South Africa and self-determination for colonized countries in Asia and Africa.

3. **Contemporary Phase:**

Post-1991, with economic liberalization and globalization, India's engagement with the UN became more development-focused. The UN system in India today supports key national priorities poverty eradication, gender equality, environmental sustainability, health, and education aligning with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

3. India's Contribution to the United Nations:

1. **Peacekeeping Operations:**

India is one of the **largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations** since 1948. Indian troops have served in over **50 missions** across countries including Congo, Sudan, Lebanon, Somalia, and South Sudan. More than **250,000 Indian peacekeepers** have participated, and over **170 have sacrificed their lives** in service to global peace. India's peacekeeping efforts are widely recognized for professionalism and neutrality. The Indian Armed Forces have also included the world's first all-women Formed Police Unit deployed in Liberia in 2007, demonstrating India's commitment to gender inclusion in international peace operations.

2. **Role in the UN Security Council:**

India has served as a **non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC)** eight times — in 1950–51, 1967–68, 1972–73, 1977–78, 1984–85, 1991–92, 2011–12, and 2021–22. Throughout these terms, India has emphasized the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention, and peaceful resolution of disputes. India has also been a strong advocate for **UNSC reform**, seeking permanent membership along with Brazil, Germany, and Japan (the G4 nations). India argues that the Security Council, with its 1945 structure, no longer reflects contemporary global realities.

3. **Advocacy for Disarmament and Non-Violence:**

Reflecting Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, India has consistently supported **nuclear disarmament and global peace**. It co-sponsored the **Resolution on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons** in 1950 and has urged the adoption of a **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)** to address terrorism globally. Although India conducted nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998, it maintains a **no-first-use policy** and continues to advocate for global, non-discriminatory disarmament frameworks.

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4. India's Role in Human Rights and Social Justice:

India has been a member of the **UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** several times. It contributed to the drafting of major human rights instruments and supports initiatives on **women's empowerment, child welfare, and anti-discrimination**. Indian diplomats such as **Lakshmi Pandit** and **Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit** (the first woman President of the UN General Assembly in 1953) played historic roles in promoting human rights and gender equality at the UN.

4. Role of the United Nations in India's Development:

The UN's engagement in India extends beyond diplomacy to direct developmental support through its specialized agencies and programs.

1. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):

The **UNDP** has worked in India since 1951, supporting initiatives in poverty reduction, capacity building, and governance. It partners with the Government of India on projects related to:

- Skill development and entrepreneurship (linked to *Skill India*)
- Climate resilience and renewable energy
- Digital governance and sustainable livelihoods

The UNDP's "Human Development Reports" have also influenced India's policy frameworks by emphasizing inclusive and equitable growth.

2. UNICEF and WHO: Health and Education:

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** and the **World Health Organization (WHO)** have been instrumental in improving health and education indicators in India. UNICEF has collaborated with India on:

- The **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)**
- Campaigns for **child nutrition and sanitation** (e.g., *Swachh Bharat Mission*)
- The **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** initiative promoting girls' education

The **WHO** played a vital role in India's **eradication of polio**, officially achieved in 2014. It continues to assist India in disease control, maternal health, and pandemic preparedness, including during the COVID-19 crisis.

3. FAO and WFP: Food Security:

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** and the **World Food Programme (WFP)** support India in agricultural modernization, food distribution, and nutrition security.FAO has contributed to projects on sustainable agriculture and crop diversification, while WFP aids in improving the **Public Distribution System (PDS)** and **mid-day meal schemes** to combat hunger and malnutrition.

4. UNESCO: Cultural and Educational Collaboration:

The **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** supports education reforms and preservation of India's cultural heritage. Several Indian monuments — such as the Taj Mahal, Ajanta Caves, and Jaipur City — are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. UNESCO also promotes

educational access and digital literacy through initiatives like *Education for All* and *ICT for Education* programs in India.

5. **UN Women: Gender Equality:**

UN Women collaborates with the Indian government and civil society to promote women's participation in politics, combat gender-based violence, and support economic empowerment. Its partnership with India's Ministry of Women and Child Development strengthens legal frameworks and public awareness about gender justice.

5. The United Nations and India's Sustainable Development Agenda:

India played a vital role in shaping the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, adopted by the UN in 2015.

The **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** directly align with India's national programs, such as:

- **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana*, *MGNREGA*
- **SDG 3 (Good Health):** *Ayushman Bharat*
- **SDG 5 (Gender Equality):** *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*
- **SDG 7 (Clean Energy):** *International Solar Alliance* (an India–France-led UN initiative)
- **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** India's *National Action Plan on Climate Change*

The UN system in India coordinates through the **United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF 2023–2027)**, focusing on inclusive growth, environmental sustainability, and digital transformation.

6. India's Quest for Permanent Membership in the UN Security Council:

India's demand for **permanent membership** in the UNSC is grounded in its democratic credentials, population size, military capability, and contributions to peacekeeping. With over **1.4 billion people** and a growing global economic footprint, India argues that its exclusion undermines the credibility and representativeness of the Security Council.

The **G4 nations (India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan)** advocate for reforms under the principle of equitable regional representation. India has received strong support from countries like France, Russia, and the United States. Despite this, political divisions within the UN including opposition from some permanent members have stalled progress on reform. Nonetheless, India continues to leverage its global partnerships and diplomatic influence to advance this agenda.

7. Challenges in India–UN Relations:

While India and the UN share strong ties, certain challenges persist:

1. **Bureaucratic and Structural Constraints:**

   The UN's institutional bureaucracy sometimes limits the speed and effectiveness of program implementation in India. Coordination across multiple agencies can be complex and overlapping.

2. **Funding and Resource Limitations:**

   UN projects in India often face financial constraints due to declining donor support. This affects long-

term project sustainability, especially in rural and marginalized regions.

3. Political Divergences:

Differences occasionally arise between India and the UN on issues like Kashmir, nuclear disarmament, and human rights. India maintains that such matters are internal and must be resolved bilaterally, whereas some UN bodies have taken differing stances.

4. Need for Policy Synchronization:

While the UN supports India's development goals, aligning them with local governance and federal structures remains a challenge. Effective implementation requires coordination between national, state, and international stakeholders

8. Future Prospects of India–UN Cooperation:

Looking ahead, India and the United Nations can deepen cooperation in several key areas:

1. **Climate Change and Energy Transition:**

   Collaboration under the *International Solar Alliance* and *Mission Life (Lifestyle for Environment)* can position India as a global leader in sustainable development.

2. **Digital Governance and Innovation:**

   The UN can assist India in advancing digital inclusion, cybersecurity, and AI ethics through programs supported by **UNDP** and **ITU**.

3. **Humanitarian and Peace Missions:**

   India can continue contributing to UN peacekeeping and share best practices in post-conflict reconstruction.

4. **Health Security:**

   Strengthening ties with **WHO** and **UNICEF** will enhance India's capacity for pandemic preparedness and healthcare infrastructure.

5. **UN Reform Advocacy:**

   India's proactive diplomacy in coalition with developing nations can accelerate reform of global governance institutions.

9. Conclusion:

The United Nations has played a pivotal role in India's socio-economic transformation and global engagement. From supporting post-independence nation-building to partnering on contemporary challenges such as climate change and digital inclusion, the UN has remained an important ally in India's development journey. Conversely, India's consistent contribution to peacekeeping, human rights advocacy, and sustainable development demonstrates its deep commitment to multilateralism and global cooperation. While challenges remain — particularly regarding UN reforms and resource limitations — the India–UN partnership continues to evolve dynamically. As the world confronts new global crises, from pandemics to environmental degradation, India and the United Nations stand as crucial partners in shaping a fair, peaceful, and sustainable world order.

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