

Gender and Cultural Diversity as a Force Multiplier in Military Preparedness

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Abstract. India has a large body of over one and a half million troops comprising just the army (not to mention a blue-water navy, a formidable air force, and other paramilitary forces) who come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cultures and practice different religions; the country's progressive society has now started to contribute women to military units not just in logistics and administration but also as fighter aircraft pilots. However, what is unique is that irrespective of the religious and cultural composition of regiments and battalions, military leaders get commissioned and command troops from diverse multicultural identities on the basis of randomised selection with no consideration of their caste, culture, or religion. This is in consonance with a famous adage in the Indian military: 'The religion and culture of officers is the religion and culture of troops that they command'. This chapter seeks to understand the dynamics of integrating multicultural religious identities of personnel serving in the military and the tempering of leadership required to earn respect and be acceptable as a leader and command troops in operations as well as during peacetime. The discussion will include military values interwoven in common religious traditions and cultural practices before, during, and after induction into operations as well as major training events like field firing, battle inoculation training, military exercises, and movement of troops/units as well as sports and competitions, along with implications and possible replication in other militaries across the globe.

Keywords. Multicultural diversity, gender sensitisation, military integration

"A weapon does not recognise the gender or cultural background of the soldier; what it does recognise is their holding, aiming and trigger operation (HAT) competencies that bring about tangible outcomes at target end."

—Lt Col Dr Samir Rawat

1. Introduction

With two hostile neighbours on its north-western and eastern flank, one a military-dominated terror-exporting nation and the other an aggrandizing communist state seeking to dominate the region with its regular military 'muscle flexing', it is understandable that even a peace-loving nation like India needs to maintain a strong and well-trained standing army to protect itself against aggression. The more than one and a half million troops of this large body, comprising just the army (not to mention a blue-water navy,

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a formidable air force, and other paramilitary forces), come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cultures and practice different religions. India's progressive society has now started to contribute women in not just logistics and administration in military units but as fighter aircraft pilots as well; it is this rich diversity that acts as a force multiplier in military preparedness [1].

However, what is unique is that irrespective of the religious and cultural composition of regiments and battalions, military leaders get commissioned and command troops from diverse multicultural identities on the basis of randomised selection with no consideration of their caste, culture, or religion [2]. This is in consonance with a famous adage in the Indian military: 'The religion and culture of officers is the religion and culture of the troops that they command'. This chapter seeks to understand the dynamics of integrating gender and multicultural religious identities of personnel serving in the military and the tempering of leadership required to earn respect and be acceptable as a leader and command troops in operations as well as during peacetime. The discussion will include military values interwoven in common religious traditions and cultural practices before, during, and after induction into operations as well as major training events like field firing, battle inoculation training, military exercises, and movement of troops/units as well as sports and competitions, along with implications and possible replication in other militaries across the globe.

2. Indian Contexts

2.1. *Historical Background*

When the British found their colonial efforts to rule the Indian subcontinent untenable, they hurriedly left in 1947, not before creating two nations and a host of complex problems to keep the two at 'daggers drawn'. One nation went on to become an economically sound, stable, and secular state recognised as one of the largest democracies in the world, while the other, strutting as an Islamic state, continued its existence in strife and tottered on the verge of collapse and world debt. The essential difference between these two countries, which once shared common cultures, is that secular India has an army of one and a half million soldiers from all walks of life, religions, castes, and creeds to protect its democratic values against internal and external aggression. On the other hand, Pakistan's military has an Islamic nation to govern (and is seen as bleeding the country's resources) through puppet government/military dictatorial regimes. The country has had a chequered history since birth and still struggles to justify its existence to its own people and to the outside world by being the biggest exporter of terrorism, not just in the neighbourhood, but across the globe [3].

The armed forces in India is a classic example of 'unity in diversity' and is the glue that binds the country together [4]. Fortunately, while soldiers who mostly come from rural areas are God fearing and religious, they do not have a religious identity crisis as they are free to practice their own faith, as long as they respect the faith of other soldiers. An interesting concept of having a common place of worship [5] permits soldiers of different faiths to pray not only to their own god(s) but also to gods of other faiths (the more the merrier—at least one of them will listen if the other is busy with more important tasks at hand). Every unit/subunit has a religious teacher (chaplain) who caters to administering religious ceremonies, rituals, and traditions for the soldiers and their families [6]. The amazing part is that in units/subunits where religious teachers are on leave, religious

teachers of other faiths perform their functions and duties [7], including religious ceremonies and rituals for soldiers. It is not uncommon for a Hindu religious teacher to recite verses from the Koran or a Muslim religious teacher to quote from the Gita or Bible in places of worship as well as during religious ceremonies in the military [8].

With politicians, the elite, industrialists, and bureaucrats in India having no direct or even remote experience of military matters, let alone exposure to combat operations—neither during the world wars nor during military operations in 1948, 1962, 1965, 1971, or 1999—the role that its defence forces is expected to play has been marginalised and has evolved until recently at a snail's pace, since there is no psychological understanding that military power is essential to provide strategic leverage [9]. Under such circumstances, to uphold Indian democracy, it is only understandable that the armed forces is representative enough to integrate the diverse cultural milieu in India, that it remain apolitical and dedicated to the tasks with which it is entrusted, and that it display a high order of professionalism at all times by perfecting its professional skills. These characteristics are unlike the military counterparts from across the border, who spend a majority of their time in military/business interests which are civilian yet profitable in nature [10].

2.2. Gender and the Military in India

While gender refers to traits and behaviours that a particular culture judges to be appropriate for men and women [11], an individual's identity in terms of gender has three components: gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender-role behaviours [12]. Gender identity is a person's self-identification as male or female as well as their beliefs about gender roles and attributes. While gender integration and equity is not a new topic in military contexts, it remains controversial enough even in the 21st century for policy-makers and senior military leadership to exercise caution and restraint in making concerted efforts to progressively move towards establishing gender equity in the military [13].

The idea that women and men are best suited for different jobs is diminishing and the concept of the right person in the right job is flourishing. Modern militaries are an apt example of this change, since they feel that it is better to recruit women of higher intelligence than men of lower intelligence with the changing spectrum of conflicts. Research on factors influencing the inclusion of women in the Indian army was stimulated by the expanding role of women in the militaries of other nations. A few of the factors include induction of women into the services, supporting arms, and combat arms.

2.3. Recruitment Policy for Women in the Indian Military

In the Indian army [14], women have served in the Military Nursing Service since 1927 as nurses. Women were commissioned as medical officers for the first time in 1944 in the Army Medical Corps. They have the same terms and conditions of service as male officers and are eligible for permanent commission like their male counterparts. However, the tenure of Short Service Commission (SSC) officers is for five years, extendable by another nine years in two parts, first of five years and second of four years, for those who are willing to continue and meet the eligibility criteria and are also eligible for grant of Department Permanent Commission subject to fulfilment of eligibility and age criteria [15].

In 1992 a first batch of 25 female officers (non-medical officers) was selected for training in the Officers Training Academy, Chennai; these women were commissioned

in 1993. This entry of women officers was initiated to fill the shortfall of 11,000 personnel in the officer cadre [16]. They were inducted as Short Service Commissioned Officers, initially for a period of five years, in the Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps, Army Education Corps (AEC), and Judge Advocate Generals Branch (JAG); this term was extendable by another five years. Gradually the changes were made, and induction of female officers was started in the Corps of Electronic and Mechanical Engineers, Intelligence Corps, and supporting arms like the Corps of Engineers, Corps of Signals, and Army Air Defence, which was extended up to 14 years in 2006. Female officers have been in supporting arms and services in the Indian army for more than two decades now, but they are not yet allowed in combat arms like infantry, armoured, and artillery units, like most of the militaries in the world.

Women are presently recruited into the Indian army [17] as officers through the SSC on an all-India merit basis along with male candidates. Female officers are inducted into the Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps, Army Education Corps, and Judge Advocate General Branch, including areas focussing on signals, intelligence, and electrical and mechanical engineering [17]. In addition, they are also commissioned in the Medical Branch Army Medical Corps, the Army Dental Corps, and the Military Nursing Service. Further, female officers are eligible for a grant of permanent commission in the JAG Department and the AEC.

The air force has pioneered the entry of women as officers in flying and ground duty. In the Indian navy, female officers are inducted through the SSC in logistics, law, observers, air traffic control, piloting (Maritime Reconnaissance Stream), the Naval Armament Inspectorate cadre, and the Naval Architecture and Education Branch.

The case for grants of permanent commission to female officers is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India; hence there is a court stay on the release of female officers who want to serve beyond 14 years. Those who want to quit on completion of 14 years can go on release as per the existing terms and conditions of service. The female officers of the AEC and JAG were granted permanent commission in 2011. Permanent commission implies that they can serve for a minimum period of 20 years and have the same terms and conditions of service for promotions, field postings, courses, and pensioner benefits as permanent commissioned male officers.

2.4. Women's Representation in the Indian Military

Despite some areas being closed to women and the low intake rate of women in the army, research has shown that incorporation of women into the several branches of the army has been quite positive. As per statistics supplied by the Defence Minister in Parliament [18], the Indian army suffers from a deficiency of approximately 8,000 officers in its total authorized strength of 47,574. The shortfall is 7,770 among lieutenant colonels, majors, captains, and lieutenants. The armed forces, however, are still reluctant to induct female officers in larger numbers, even though they are now given permanent commission in the AEC and JAG branches. Despite female officers being inducted into the Indian armed forces since 1993, in 2016 there were about 1,512 in the army, 1,584 in the air force, and 453 in the navy. They are not inducted in combat arms like infantry, artillery, or armoured corps, nor do they serve on board operational warships. Though women in the Indian air force fly transport planes and helicopters, the first three women to fly fighter jets qualified only in June 2017.

Table 1. Annual Recruitment of Female Officers in the Indian Military.

Year	Army	Navy	Air Force
2013	127	50	144
2014	104	57	155
2015	72	35	223
2016	69	43	108

Details about female officers [19] in the army (excluding the Medical, Dental, and Nursing Branch), the air force (excluding the Medical and Dental Branch), and the navy are shown in Table 1.

Though the entire Indian armed forces (navy, army, and air force) are male dominated, the army fares the worst when it comes to gender parity. In a written response to a question in Rajya Sabha [20], Minister of State for Defence Subhash Bhamre said that induction of women into the army is based on organisational requirements, fighting efficiency, combat effectiveness, and functionality of the force. Yet while women comprise 13% of the Indian air force workforce, they constitute only 3.8% of the army workforce. He added that women comprise 6% of navy personnel. Bhamre stated that women make up 21.63% and 20.75% of the staff in the armed forces' medical and dental services, respectively. Also, all nursing officers in the armed forces are women. General Bipin Rawat [21], who is the current Chief of Army Staff, questioned women's ability to lead troops in battle and said that it would be difficult to assign women in front-line combat roles. He reasoned that since most soldiers come from villages, they may not be able to accept a woman officer leading them. He also cited logistical hurdles behind putting women on the front lines, as the Army would have to "cocoon her separately".

It is often perceived that the physical capability of women, their impact on operational effectiveness, marital conflict, and emotional stability are the most important challenges for their employment in non-traditional roles [22]. The border area and battlefield of India is dangerous and risky to operate in, for both military men and women; hence the commanders are apprehensive about employment of women in fighting arms and some supporting arms, which is an indicator of the barrier towards inclusion of women in the military. The majority of the Indian army is deployed mostly in difficult and harsh areas with isolated posts which lack basic facilities and are cut off for months at a time, thus restricting the single deployment of female officers in such places; this is one of the critical barriers to their inclusion [23]. Existing terms and conditions of service, like promotion only up to the rank of lieutenant colonel, lack of permanent commission, and lack of pension, are big barriers for the greater inclusion of women [24]. Other potential barriers to gender inclusion in the Indian army include requirements of maternity leave, policies concerning spouse postings, and lack of belongingness, since they feel they are not going to serve for longer durations. Carreiras [25] points out that women's access to some military positions, like those related to combat, military academies, or positions of power inside the ranks, is not uniform, and women are mostly missing from decision-making circles regarding defence and military matters. One of the most significant obstacles to the inclusion of women, both inside and outside the military, is traditional opinion; although it is not empirically based, it still serves as a basis for decision making. Cultural resistance to change in the armed forces has and will continue to limit the inclusion of women.

2.5. *Increasing Participation of Women in the Military*

In spite of the military's history as a gender-defined institution, women have been serving in the armed forces with higher participation over a period of time; this reflects changes in gender norms in civilian society, the role of women, and evolution in the nature of the military itself [26]. The number of vacancies open to female officers in the Indian army has increased from 50 at the time of initial induction in 1993 to 150; additionally, more career courses have been opened up for women, the term of engagement increased from 5 years to 10 years and finally 14 years, and the duration of maternity leave has been increased from two months to six months. The Indian army chief recently gave a press statement saying that the army is set to open up positions of combat and other ranks for women, and it will commence with recruitment of women in the military police [27].

In 2011, the government approved consideration of women as Short Service Commission Officers (SSCOs) for grants of permanent commission along with male SSCO in specific branches in the three services: JAG and AEC and their corresponding branches in the navy and air force (Naval Constructor in the navy and Accounts Branch in the air force).

In March 2016, approval was accorded for induction of female SSCO as pilots in the Maritime Reconnaissance Stream and in the Naval Armament Inspectorate; inductions commenced in 2017.

In the Indian air force, since 1993 female officers have been inducted in all branches and streams as SSCO except in the fighter stream. However, the air force has revised the SSC scheme to induct women into the fighter stream on an experimental basis for five years. The first batch of three female officers was commissioned in the fighter stream on June 18, 2016. Incidentally, in February 2019, one of the twelve deep-penetration aircraft that bombed terrorist camps across the Indian border in Balakot, Pakistan, had a female pilot.

Thus, gender inclusion is a need of the hour, as it has a positive impact on all organisations and individuals, and the military is no exception. In India, we have a long way to go in accepting the concept of gender equity and acting in accordance with equal opportunities for women in the military, as is prevalent in the Western world. A diverse and inclusive workforce creates diverse benefits for the organisation. Inclusion can be made effective through improved recruitment, training and employment practices, and policies with careful identification of barriers and opportunities for improvement. If women are given an enhanced role, equal opportunities for employment, career development, and increased specialist job opportunities due to technological advancement, more and more women will be inclined to choose the military as a career, and in the bargain the deficit of officers in the military will be reduced considerably. To increase the participation of women in the military, concerted steps like increasing the tenure of female officers and improving promotional prospects need to be taken.

With respect to gender, surely if a woman can be a defence minister of a powerful military like that of India, whose personnel need to exhibit not just perceived masculine warrior traits (bravery, courage, physical strength, endurance, and stamina) but also to acquire, among other things, 'feminine characteristics' (empathy and high emotional intelligence), why can't women shatter the male hegemony and take on the mantle of military leadership in subordinate positions as chief of the army, navy, or air force? Perhaps the die has just been cast, as a critical decision was very recently taken in this direction with the planned induction of female cadets for officer training at the National Defence

Academy, Khadakwasla, leading to their permanent commission and subsequent rise in the military ranks.

2.6. Culture and Diversity

Culture has been variously defined, and most definitions include aspects of some or all of the following: knowledge, skills, rules, norms, practices, traditions, language, and values that shape and guide beliefs and behaviour in a particular group of people, in addition to the art, literature, folklore, and artefacts produced and passed down to the next generation [28]. According to Jeffery [29], culture is a shared and relatively stable pattern of behaviours, values, and assumptions that a group has learned over a period of time as an effective means of maintaining internal social stability and adapting to its environment, and that are transmitted to new members as the correct ways to perceive, think, and act in relation to these issues.

All over the world, the cultural composition of the military is changing, and it is no longer uncommon to find Sikh soldiers of Indian origin serving in foreign armies in the UK, the US, Canada, and, of all places, in Pakistan. The critical solutions to challenges in the military demand attention to the cultural forces that shape soldiers and military organisations.

2.7. Caste in India

Seven decades after independence, India continues to be ridden with caste and class prejudices, and trapped in socially determined patterns of labour, though distributive justice through affirmative action in slow yet sure. Drekeimer [31] studied kinship and community in early India and found that “when tradition and law support the rigid and continuing separation of social classes . . . we may speak of a caste society . . . a society possesses a caste system if it is divided into many specialised groups which are graded in status and mutually opposed, and which do not tolerate mixture of blood or vocation”. The caste system represents one form of social hierarchy based on oppression of the ‘have-nots’ and supported by religious beliefs, however irrational they may be [32]. Unfortunately, the caste system still exists, more so in rural India, much to the benefit of scheming politicians who see various castes and religions as polarised vote banks for their socio-political mileage.

3. Religiosity in the Military

Religion is among the most powerful of all social forces and has been in existence as long as there have been human beings [33]. It is a powerful, enduring institution and a critical socializing agent across cultures and societies [34]. However, it means different things to different people. It may vary across religious affiliations [35], particularly in the content of teachings about divine authority, power, and God’s will [36]. Researchers [37–41] have recently shown increasing interest in studying religiosity. Research studies [42–44] have been examining the link between religion and psychological, physical, and interpersonal functioning.

According to Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi [45], religiosity has been defined as “a system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other rituals

directed towards such a power” (p. 1). Pargament [46] found religiosity to be at the intersection of the sacred and a search for the significant. According to the researcher, religiosity is defined as “a process, a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (p. 32). These definitions all recognise the sacred quality of some mysterious and great power that is beyond humanity, yet related to it.

Studies [47,48] relating to religious practices indicate that behavioural dimensions of religiosity practiced most commonly by different religions include: (a) observing prayers or worshipping God, (b) performing certain specific behaviour from consideration of what is ethically good and bad, (c) observing rituals with faith that there is life beyond death or a world beyond this reality, and (d) observing sacrifice, tolerance, forgiveness, etc. as religious values.

In other words, religiosity indicates the degree to which an individual can be identified as religious. Religiosity refers to having faith in a power beyond oneself whereby an individual seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gain stability of life, and which one expresses in acts of worship and service [49].

Religiosity as a social function may provide a religious soldier with a wholesome occupation during his or her spare time and may be able to counter the demoralizing effects of loneliness, uncertainty, and anxiety [50,51]. Research studies [52] in India have reported that religion also provides solace and comfort when soldiers encounter fear, killing, and/or witness the death of other soldiers.

One study [53] on religiosity amongst soldiers found that combat experience and death of close friends cause military personnel to lose faith in God and in that god’s power to help. The same study found that young soldiers, potentially overwhelmed with fear, grief, and guilt, control their vulnerability by toughening themselves when they experience the loss of friends killed by enemy fire.

However, a study [54] on post-traumatic mental and physical health compared forgiveness and religious coping in military combat veterans and reported that difficulty in forgiving oneself and negative religious coping are related to depression, anxiety, and severe symptoms of PTSD, but not anxiety. According to the researchers, positive religious coping is associated with the alleviation of stress, including severe symptoms of PTSD, as it helps bring the soldier back to his or her previous state of equilibrium and functional fitness in the performance of military tasks.

On the other hand, Fontana and Rosenheck [55] studied change in the strength of religious faith, as well as mental health service, amongst combat veterans treated for stress. They found that veterans’ experience of killing and failing to prevent death weakened their religious faith, both directly and indirectly, by precipitating feelings of guilt. They also found that veterans who used mental health services appeared to be driven more by their guilt and weakening of their religious faith than by deficits in social functioning. These researchers also determined that religious coping activities like prayer and gratitude are significant predictors of psychological stress in combat situations. They found that stressful experiences over time had a negative impact on the effectiveness of religious coping methods. This impact, in turn, caused a separation from religion, and its influence declined significantly under the strain of war. A study by Gallaway [56] found that religiosity was not all powerful, whether in bolstering or sapping soldiers’ willingness to fight when on the battlefield.

3.1. Religiosity Research

Research on the religiosity of military personnel in India by this author has determined that successful military leadership in combat requires a strong and positive interpersonal bond of connectedness between leaders and the troops they take into battle [57]. It has also been reported by Govadia [58] that conditions of selflessness and ‘leader-led religiosity’ can help reduce uncertainty, ambiguity, and insecurity under the severe physical and psychological stress of battle. Bhandal [59] too found that religiosity provides a greater sense of meaning, purpose, connectedness, tolerance, and understanding amongst military personnel.

In a study exploring levels of religiosity among military personnel, Rawat [60] found that personnel below the officer rank displayed more religiosity than a comparable sample of officers. In addition to rank differences, his research found that military personnel with 11–20 years of military service were more religious than military personnel with 0–10 years of military service. Also, serving military personnel who had combat experience were found to be more religious than military personnel who had not yet taken part in military operations; the study revealed that soldiers tended to exhibit deep religious faith. It is certainly notable that any major unit activities in the Indian army are preceded by a religious ceremony.

Other researchers [61] have independently studied religiosity among military personnel in the Indian army and discovered that it serves as a unifying binding factor that motivates troops in combat. They also have reported that religion builds character and moral rearmament and provides mental peace to military personnel. A number of related studies by Schumm and Rotz [62] as well as Meisenhelder [63] have shown an increase in religious practices and beliefs during and immediately following combat experience. Similar results have been reported by Rawat [64] as well as by Singh [65] in his sociological research on military personnel in India.

The effect of a community religiosity contributes to unit morale and cohesion, while consolation explains events (e.g., deaths) and maintains discipline; this therapeutic process of dealing with issues related to survivor guilt continues even after the battle is over as soldiers seek to understand why death spared them and not their colleagues who were martyred in battle [66]. Watson [67] found that religiosity instills in soldiers a spirit of endurance and determination that no hardship and no suffering can undermine or break down; similar results were found by this author in India that demonstrated that religiosity is one of the most powerful agents for sustaining troops’ morale before, during, and after military operations [68].

Shaw and Linley [69] found religion to be beneficial to most soldiers in sustaining them in battle and dealing with its stressful experience, which may lead to a deepening of religiosity. Studies [70,71] have demonstrated that positive religious coping, religious openness, and readiness to face existential questions as well as religious participation are associated with post-traumatic growth.

Psychotherapeutic effects of religiosity in combat stress control and battle fatigue have been reported. It has been found that negative effects of combat stress can be lessened when a soldier is prepared physically, emotionally, and religiously prior to combat. It has been observed that religiosity helps soldiers to draw upon religious strength and share strength and confidence during intensive combat. Soldiers’ inner resources are often based on their religious and spiritual values. It has been found that in combat, soldiers show more interest in their religious beliefs. When religious values are challenged during the chaos of combat, soldiers may lose sight of inner resources that sustain them [72,73].

Irrespective of religious orientation, an effective military force demands an unlimited commitment from its members: the average soldier must be prepared to give up his or her life for the nation if and when the need arises. Under these circumstances, religious background takes a back seat and nationalist pride becomes a calling which is interwoven in regimental spirit, honour, and loyalty to kinsmen in the military sworn to fight together, and if the need arises, to die fighting for the national cause.

3.2. Professional Military Culture and Character

For centuries, the military was a freelance trade and considered to be a commodity to be traded between rulers; patriotism meant little to these mercenary soldiers, and loyalties were mixed and temporary [74]; the military command structure mirrored the social structure, with leaders taking command and applying to war much the same mixture of customs, traditions, and improvisation with which they led their communities during other times in peace [75]. Until a surprisingly late stage, religion was considered a stronger bond than nationality, until the stirrings of modern nationalism heralded the age of nation states [76].

Following the first war of Indian independence in 1857, Lord Roberts, who was commander-in-chief of the 'British' Indian Army from 1885 to 1893, developed the Indian regimental system, which is largely still in force today, due to the realisation that battalions comprising men from the same area and caste fought better as an entity [77]. As such, even today an overwhelming bulk of fighting units—infantry, armoured, and artillery—are organised on a single-class (area/caste) basis, at either the battalion or company level. However, this system has its pros and cons: it can generate intense loyalties, especially during military operations as well as during inter-unit sports competitions, yet it also has restricted horizons [78].

Jeffery [79] refers to professionalism in the military where its members apply their unique body of military expertise in accordance with the civic, legal, ethical, and military values of military ethos, pursuant to the profession's responsibility to society, and to a strong personal identification with military activities and a military way of life. In other words, it is the 'how we do things' attitude which may be a challenge for change in organisations like the military where strong cultural values, loyalty, and a strong sense of tradition inculcated during formative military training may provide resistance to change in an attempt to preserve what is seen as a valued tradition as against necessary change that is so necessary to keep abreast with the times.

According to Dandekar [80], culture comprises a set of beliefs, ideas, and symbols that provide a definition of the world for a group or organisation as well as guides for action. Military culture is unique in that it stands apart from society in the degree of leadership, teamwork, discipline, and loyalty to the organisation; it has an 'institutional' quality in which the main drivers are values (including core values of subordination of the self to the group and willingness to sacrifice one's life for the team during peace and war) rather than the market in the sense that the primary tasks are not to make profits but to implement values that provide an overall purpose of the organization [81]. Researchers [82,83] have reported that professional military culture includes concepts of honour, unflinching obedience, sacrifice, and the use of 'legitimate violence' to restore order and protect those who entrust the military with their lives.

In all professions, methods are dictated partly by tasks in hand in current circumstances, and partly by the way that the accretions of time have shaped professional attitudes. To be considered professional, Downey [84] stated that the military must satisfy

three criteria: a) permanence—a sizeable full-time nucleus that exists to cater to its complex objectives to justify its existence in proving itself during the extreme confusion of war, b) proficiency—technical and technological knowledge and skills as well as tactical and strategical competencies, and c) service—it must be under the will of the people via some political authority of unprecedented government control of military detail.

Success in military operations requires soldiers to have high ideals, character, and high morale which depends on development of strong camaraderie, character, and cohesiveness among all soldiers [85]; as such, military leaders have a unique role in shaping the patriotic pride of multicultural identity of the armed forces which cannot allow fissiparous elements in society and rogue politicians to use it for their personal gain [86]. The strength lies in building national character that epitomises unity through kinship in multicultural diversity and is bereft of any single religious overtones [87]. While fighting units and subunits have a fixed class and mixed class composition based on the martial race concept as envisaged ever since the British raised regiments in India, it is the moral character and diversity in strength stemming from soldiers of all hues and colours, religions, castes, and regions which is the dominating factor which epitomises professionalism of the armed forces in India.

4. Factors Promoting Patriotic Pride of Multicultural Diversity and National Integration

In India, the challenge lies not in the diversity of religions and faiths but in the country's vastness, the plurality of languages, and different historical traditions and regionalism, propped up by vested interests and fringe elements seeking personal gains.

Singh [88] as well as Khan [89] reported an interesting co-existence of diverse religions among troops in India; all religious occasions are celebrated together with national pride by all military personnel. Research studies have found that exploiting commonality in practices and customs of diverse religions synergizes beliefs and acts as a force multiplier that brings religious harmony and tolerance, which, in turn, leads to an improved standard of national unity and integration in army units [90].

On the other hand, studies by Parmar [91] and Rajan [92] have reported that military personnel in India place national pride above a unit's prestige, their own self-respect, and their religion. They reported that fighting in the name of religion is now an outdated concept and found no correlation between religiosity and stressors in combat. Interestingly, the results of these studies suggest that national pride would take precedence over religious affiliation, especially in armies with multicultural castes and religious compositions like the army in India. It is this patriotic pride of being a multicultural army with diversity in socio-economic backgrounds, castes, creeds, colours, languages, and religions that integrates and binds the nation as one and acts as a force multiplier in military preparedness.

The Indian military is a typical example in providing a better understanding of intercultural and cross-country differences that influence multinational military collaboration. Researchers have suggested that cross-cultural differences in organisational factors, leadership, and teamwork, as well as communication and disruptive technology and societal factors are crucial to interoperability in future military operations [93]. Military leaders could contribute to greater interoperability by instilling greater cultural sensitivity and awareness through pre-deployment programs and on-scene consultation and training of coalition personnel [94]. Since most UN and NATO operations are conducted

in areas that are culturally distant from the deployed forces in terms of culture, traditions, language, customs, values, and religion, international collaboration and exchange among military leaders as well as military psychologists is critical for the effectiveness of interoperability and of joint coalition forces.

Camaraderie among soldiers is not just confined to the regimental spirit of soldiers in fighting units/subunits during war [95,96]. Solidarity among troops from different faiths was best displayed when soldiers from the Sikh community were targeted in trains and public places by frenzied mobs seeking revenge in the wake of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards to avenge sacrilege of their religious shrine, the Golden Temple, in 1984. Many instances have been reported where, unmindful of armed mobs, officers and men fought off frenzied crowds to save Sikh soldiers from certain lynching. This constituted payback time, for history is replete with examples of the fearless Sikh community coming to the aid and protection of women and children during the Muslim invasion in India, long before British rule. To honour the bravery of Sikhs, every Hindu family gave one son to join the Sikh faith, and this practice still continues in many parts of northern India where the brunt of the Muslim invasion was felt the most. It is during such trying and challenging times that the true multicultural diversity of soldiers and even the nation is on display. With soldiers coming from different cultures and backgrounds, they bring the best of their traditions, and a motley mix of cultures ensues that allows others to have a taste of different blends—be it food, clothing, language, customs, or way of life—and this is integration at its best. It's not just the soldiers who mutually benefit from this enriching experience, but also the families and children of military personnel who are exposed to a variety of cultures that aid their holistic development.

Using the acronym ACTIVE, critical factors, though not all encompassing, for promoting patriotic pride of multicultural diversity and national integration are enumerated:

- **Acknowledgement and awareness:** To promote patriotic pride and multicultural diversity, we need to first acknowledge that it took all Indians of various ethnic and socio-economic as well as political backgrounds, subcultures, and religions to overthrow the yoke of British rule and gain independence and freedom that came at a heavy price, with many people sacrificing their lives to achieve freedom from over 200 years of British rule. If soldiers are made aware of the contributions of all Indians, who set aside their differences of colour, religious identity, caste, and creed with a common goal and purpose of attaining freedom, they are more likely to take pride in the collective achievements of their ancestors and safeguard national interest and protect the country from falling prey to internal or external aggression at all costs.
- **Challenges dealt with appropriately:** For a big country with a large army, challenges to multicultural diversity and national integration are greatly varied in terms of the vastness in geographical distances; the plurality of languages; the existence of the caste system; and religious, cultural, and socio-economic differences, to name a few. These need to be addressed by identifying oneself as part of the military as an institution and being Indian first, with regional affiliations or religious/cultural orientations of secondary importance. The ingrained military culture of oneness with overriding loyalty to the nation must always be primary.

- **Tolerance:** Acceptance of individual differences due to cultural upbringing, regional background, socio-economic status, religious orientation, and geographical locations, to name a few, would provide the expected dignity and mutual respect among soldiers from all parts of the country. To a professional soldier who is part of a highly functional team, it's not his or her background that matters but the unique skill set and competencies that help achieve mission objectives that earns that person the respect of team members.
- **Inclusiveness:** An integrated India will emerge when individuals from diverse regions, practicing different religions, cultures, and traditions, celebrate their differences as well as their festivals together with equal élan, just like soldiers in India do. The military should thus be considered as a reference group for others to emulate through modelling. Young soldiers and their families should be encouraged to take part in festive traditions and cultural programmes of other soldiers from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Value-based soldiering:** Soldiers need to be guided in their behaviour by the institutional values and military culture that define military effectiveness by meaningfully contributing to military efforts of camaraderie and cohesiveness in being able to look after one another through good and bad times, anticipating and adapting to challenges and change in consonance with established military ethos and norms through integration and acceptance of differences among members.
- **Education:** Self-development of soldiers through progressive education shatters stereotypes and generalisations about cultures and religion other than one's own; it enhances our true understanding of nationalism and also reduces vulnerabilities to exploitation by vested interests determined to create a divide and a rift among soldiers.

5. Conclusion

What is the percentage of women in the armed forces? How many of them rise to higher ranks of leadership in the military? Answers to these questions are quantified to the extent that they measure, count, or calculate data. On the other hand, qualitative indicators capture experience, attitudes, beliefs, or feelings. For example, to what extent, if at all, do soldiers accept women as comrades in combat roles? In order to access, monitor, and implement acceptance of gender and cultural diversity in the military, we need to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

To make indicators meaningful and be able to demonstrate progress as a result of gender and cultural diversity acceptance, the military needs to document and record baseline data and targets for each indicator; the baseline shares critical information about the current situation (for example, the current percentage of women in the armed forces). The target should be the number or value that policymakers intend to reach by the end of time-bound implementation wherein targets can be broken down by year. These two markers—baseline and target—are critically important to recognise the difference the plan makes, as without baseline data, results are hard to infer and targets are not meaningful. Without specific targets, implementation can easily stall or go off track due to a lack of clarity about direction. One can collect baseline information from statistical reports, previous reviews, or assessments on the status of employment opportunities for

women as well as cultural diversity in the armed forces. The same has already been highlighted in Section 2.2 ('Gender and the Military in India').

While religious practices and traditions must be respected at all costs, military leadership will do well to recognise that it should not be allowed to hijack the military objectives and its heterogeneous composition, which ensure military values of transparency and equal opportunities that result in cohesiveness, camaraderie, and team bonding among military personnel. As such, military organisations will need to avoid replicating policies that reflect the social structure of the larger society to include caste, creed, and religious orientation; the more they are isolated from society, the better for them to focus and concentrate on their preparation for any future battle contingencies by inculcating professional habits, discipline, sense of nationalist pride, and a positive attitude towards multicultural diversity.

Social structures that lead to divisiveness in society as a whole may benefit scheming politicians who seek votes by dividing people based on caste, creed, and regional affiliations; such structures have the potential to weaken the military fabric that seeks common loyalty and unflinching commitment to the cause—where the nation always comes first, no matter what. The formative military training provides the forces an opportunity and freedom to isolate its new entrants from their previous societal conceptions and to realign and develop their internal structures that govern and conform to military norms, values, and discipline, which may be vastly different from the society as a whole. If there is any one culture to be practiced by militaries all over the world, it is a common military culture embodied in military values, ethics, and time-tested traditions which only soldiers can best understand.

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