

WOMEN IN POLICE IN INDIA: EMERGING TRENDS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Dr. Tumpa Mukherjee

Assistant Professor in Sociology, Women's Christian College

6, Greek Church Row, Kalighat, Kolkata - 700026

e-mail : tumpamukherjee@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The article deals with the experiences of women in police in India. Even in the twenty-first century women comprises 6 per cent in police force, which is still a male bastion. Women in police in India have confronted gender discrimination and marginalization from the time they were incorporated into the police force. However with the introduction of new laws on gender-related issues, changing socio-economic-political conditions women personnel across ranks and forces are demanding their rights as professional police officers having a female body.

Key Words

Gender Discrimination, Marginalization, Partition, National Conference of Women in Police, Code of Criminal Procedure, Gender Sensitization.

The news of Smt. Archana Ramasundaram being appointed as the Director General (henceforth DG) of a paramilitary force made headlines in print, electronic and social media very recently. The 1980 batch Indian Police Service officer in an interview pointed out, 'I look forward to a time when appointment of a woman as paramilitary DG will not make news'.¹ This statement very truly reveals the condition of women in police in India. Even in the twenty-first century women comprises 6 per cent in police force, which is still a male bastion. Women in police in India have confronted gender discrimination and marginalization from the time they were incorporated into the police force.

The first ever woman police officer of India, Smt. Kamalamma entered the Travancore Royal Police Service in 1933, at the age of eighteen. Her main duty was assisting male officers to arrest women criminals. She fell in love with a head constable but the rules at that time did not allow women police to marry. They lived together in secret till she got pregnant. She lost her job, but married the bold Head Constable and had six children.² The state of Travancore experimented with the appointment of one woman head constable and twelve women special police constables during the pre-independence era.³ There is no evidence to suggest that women police personnel were used by the British Police to suppress the nationalist agitation where women activists participated. However, it is reported that during the pre-independence period, a few women police were appointed in the port cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras for frisking duty. Women were inducted into the police force in Greater Mumbai in the year 1939.⁴ It was only after independence that women were appointed in the police force on a regular basis in different states, after the partition of India in 1947. Just after independence, women police were used in ports and airports as elsewhere for frisking duty of women leaving for their native home (in Pakistan). Moreover, after partition, a number of grief-stricken refugee women would meet the Prime Minister daily, expressing their grievances. So, for the Prime Minister's security and the handling of the issue of refugee women, it was felt that there was a need for women police in the general police force. As a result, one woman sub-inspector and a few women constables were appointed in Delhi for providing security to the Prime Minister when refugee women in distress contacted him.⁵ Thus gender specific recruitment of women police was the need of the hour. After independence, political agitations, bandhs, strikes, riots, became a regular feature in the different states of India and in such agitations participation of women increased with each passing year. As a result the need for handling women agitators created a drive for inducting women police. To prevent women from being man handled by men, a drive for inducting women police was created. Thus, the Indian State has always

adopted a paternalistic role of protecting its women, an attitude which prevails even after six decades of freedom. The number of police women was almost negligible in the country until the 1960s. However, in all the states the police women have played only a peripheral role and are largely limited to performing protective and preventive role while dealing with women offenders/victims and juveniles. In India, women police personnel till the mid-1970s constituted about 0.22 per cent of the total police force in the country.⁶ In 1972 Kiran Bedi became the first woman to join the Indian Police Service (IPS). There was a huge furore in the bureaucracy and the cabinet secretariat. At the interview, Bedi was requested not to pursue this career as it was an exclusive male preserve and she would find life very tough and very difficult. But she was determined to join the police service and went to the National Police Academy, Mount Abu, to receive training. One or two women who had passed the examination in the past had been manipulated to accept central services. Excuses in the form of stressful training such as horse-riding and heavy exercises in the police academy were cited to prevent women from joining the police services.⁷ In 2007, Kiran Bedi, the first woman IPS officer, opted for voluntary retirement. She was anguished at being superseded by her junior Y. S. Dadwal for the post of the Commissioner of Police, Delhi Police.⁸ A Deputy Superintendent of Police in the state of Jharkhand narrated that her district Superintendent of Police (who was a male officer) denied her permission to accompany the male team, who were assigned the duty of interrogating a hard core mafia running a crime syndicate in the central part of India.⁹ Thus women in police are often denied challenging postings and work. They suffer 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' - they are included as a part of the police organization, yet they are 'excluded' and are marginalized within the police organization.

The emergence and increase in the number of women in police from 1980s may be attributed to the spread of education, awareness as well as constitutional and legal provisions enacted by the Indian state. The dual trend towards mainstreaming of women in police as well as

professionalization of women in police is being noticed from late 1980s. In 1985 mass agitation in Gujarat against the government reservation policy took place evoking a lot of response from women. These women agitators became so aggressive that they assaulted even the security personnel. After receiving feedback of these unlawful assemblies, the then Prime Minister himself wrote to the Home Minister that to tackle these unlawful assemblies, effectively women battalions in the Central Reserve Police Force (C.R.P.F.) should be raised. The eighty-eighth mahila battalion came into existence on 6th February 1988 with encouragement from the then Prime Minister. During the communal riots in Meerut in May, 1987, three companies of the mahila battalion stationed at Delhi along with the commandant of the battalion had gone to Meerut. They were deployed in various tense areas such as Balibazar, Sadarbazar, Abdulpur and Begumphool. The mahila companies did a commendable job by recovering arms, which were used during the riot.¹⁰ Women were deployed in operational areas. Among the central police organization, Central Reserve Police Force (henceforth CRPF) women were the first to be deployed in the insurgency affected areas of Jammu and Kashmir in 1990 and continue to be deployed. CRPF was also the first force to send an all women police unit to the United Nations (henceforth U.N.) in Liberia as a part of the UN mission.¹¹

Women officers in the state police forces have been heading police stations; districts and women officers in the paramilitary forces have been commanding male personnel with courage and distinction. Tamil Nadu was the first state in India to have a woman police commando force under the patronage of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha. The unit is being used for the protection of VVIPs, escorting dangerous criminals and all major operations where the expertise of the commandos are required.¹² In strife-torn Kashmir, women at all levels have started taking part in operations against terrorists. The Special Operation Group includes women officers in anti-military operations and they have achieved spectacular success in eliminating terrorists responsible for killing of policemen, army personnel and civilians.¹³ Women in Border

Security Force have been guarding the Punjab side of the Indo-Pak border ever since their induction in 2010. Though women troopers are being used for non-combat duties such as frisking women and villagers farming across the fence in Indian territory, they have been trained for patrolling and using weapons.¹⁴ Women police in the Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force are engaged in patrolling the borders. They are a part of the team which escorts civilians to Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. In Tripura, women police are engaged in controlling traffic. Though they are not in total combat operation with men in jungles in the extremist areas, they go out for patrolling with the police team in the morning. In Nagaland, women's battalion is in the process of being formed. Their basic training has been completed and they are engaged in commando training.¹⁵ The Government of India has approved 33 % reservation for women in the constable rank in two major central paramilitary forces CRPF and CISF, and also setting a 15% quota in the border forces BSF, SSB, ITBF.¹⁶ Post 2000s onwards four salient features are emerging. Firstly, the numbers of women in police have increased. Secondly, they have been allotted operational duties. Thirdly, mainstreaming of women in police is taking place. Fourthly, women are joining international law enforcement agencies and getting exposed to international policing.

One of the most important features of this phase is the National Conference of Women in Police (henceforth NCWP). NCWP is the only all women police conference in which women cops of all ranks are represented at a national level. Till now, seven NCWP have been organized. The main aim of these conferences is to establish bonding among women police personnel in different ranks. The conferences held so far have highlighted the problems of women in police service and recommended suitable measures for mainstreaming of women within the police organization. The pivotal issues discussed in these conferences have been the mainstreaming of women in police by increasing their recruitment to 33 per cent. Open recruitment and a single common cadre for both women and men have been recommended for all ranks so that they receive equal promotional opportunities. The first NCWP

recommended establishing a Forum for Women in Police. It would comprise women in police of all ranks in each state. Its function would be to expand and network, and share experiences to enable them to make an effective professional contribution to the service. Such forums help to reduce professional isolation and women can gain access to knowledge related to their career advancement. It has been reiterated, time and again, that women police personnel must have access to all jobs and should receive field postings as station house officers and sub-divisional police officers. Field postings in the initial stages of career have been encouraged at these conferences, for effective mainstreaming of women in police. It has been further stated that even though more women should be allotted mainstream duties of crime prevention and investigation, yet the postings and transfer polices should match the stages of career with the stages of life.¹⁷

In all the conferences held so far, one of the recommendations have been that pregnant women are assigned light/off-field desk duty. One of the recommendations has been framing of a formal policy guideline for light, non-field postings during pregnancy. The Superintendent of Police (SP) / Commandant must be entitled to permit pregnant women to wear sari / salwar kameez from the beginning of the third month of pregnancy.¹⁸ The conferences recommended improvement of infrastructural facilities in the workplace by providing each police station /police units with toilets and restrooms for women. Day care centers and crèches to be set up in the police lines to support both men and women police with young children and provision of providing official transport/vehicles for official work.¹⁹ Women police personnel suffer from stress in both their personal and professional spheres. The second conference recommended setting up of counseling programs for the recruits and their families to enable better appreciation of the demands of a police career. The counseling facilities should be arranged during the pre-and post induction period on personal and professional matters.²⁰ A resource centre is to be established by every police organization to

provide career information to help make informed choices about future career and such information may be made available on police intranet.²¹

The Delhi Gang Rape and its aftermath

On 16th December 2012, a paramedical student accompanied by her male friend, was brutally gang-raped in a moving bus in Delhi. The incident caused a huge public furore in India. The Government of India in a bid to control this unprecedented anger among people appointed a committee headed by late Justice J. S. Verma to review the existing laws on offence against women and draft a blueprint on safety and security of women. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, was enacted. Acid attack, stalking etc. were included within the purview of the new legal provisions. For the crime of rape stringent punishment has been laid down. The state governments have been told to have women help desk in every police station. The states have been asked to look into the possibility of creating a separate fleet of all women PCR (Public Control Room) vehicles particularly in cities where crime is on the rise. Kolkata Police is planning to set up a specialized anti-rape wing so that the investigation of such cases are completed fast. There are plans to get the statement recorded by women officials as it will be easier for a victim to narrate her plight to a woman. The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) of Section 157, in 2010, allows the victim to get her statement recorded at her home or at place of her choice in presence of her parents or relatives and preferably by a woman police officer. The union government has asked the state government to begin a fresh recruitment drive to improve women: men ratio in police forces. The Deputy Superintendent of Police should be made the nodal officer for crime against women in every district, while one Additional Director-General should be designated as the nodal officer in every state to look after complaints regarding crime against women.²² Thus in recent time a 'gendered model of policing' is being followed where women police are 'policing their own gender'. However they are no longer working as

social workers. Women police personnel are receiving specialized training to deal with offences committed against women. They have received training on investigation, scientific interrogation, forensic sciences and medicine at SVPNPA, LNJNNICFS, and CDTS etc.

The seventh National Conference on Women in Police jointly organized by the Bureau of Police Research and Development, New Delhi, and the Central Reserve Police Force in Gurgaon was held from 6th to 8th January, 2016. In this conference Ms. Renuka Mishra, Inspector General in border guarding force SSB presented a paper 'Creating Gender Sensitive Work Equipment and Infrastructure' based on her survey of 334 women police personnel across various ranks, in the Central Reserve Police Force, Sashastra Seema Bal, the National Police Academy in Hyderabad and those in state police force of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Telengana, Maharashtra, Gujrat, and Odisha, apart from sourcing content from reports prepared by a Parliamentary Standing Committee and the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission. The survey reveals lack of basic amenities such as toilets, uncomfortable duty gear and want of privacy in these police organizations. The survey found while women cops go on a long spells of no water to avoid urination; it is also hard for them to find a proper place to wash their clothes and even to dry their undergarments, while on job. Women found it difficult when it comes to their accoutrement as 'nothing fits' their size as largely caps, shoes, track suits and dungarees are made keeping in mind the male body. The bullet proof or body protection vests provided to them are so heavy, tight, and ill-fitting that they cause pain and breathlessness, as they are made as per the physical requirement of a flat-chest male body. This is also true of the other body-protection gear or anti-riot equipment like the helmet, fiber glass shield, lathi, belt, shoes, and winter jackets. As women have smaller palms, it is like a challenge for them to get a firm grip on the weapon issued to them, like a pistol or an INSAS rifle. However it does not imply that they don't know how to use or shoot, just that the firearm is too big. Women especially in constabulary, find it uncomfortable while travelling in heavy vehicles and trucks to report for work particularly

during menstruation or pregnancy. Some of them felt the traditional 'cross belt' on the uniforms should be done away with, as it is 'inconvenient' during toilet usage. The surveyed women also said they wanted more 'dignified' and 'elegant' uniforms. In western countries, women personnel have gender specific equipment including caps or helmets which makes space for their long hair, hands free belt for firearms and attachments. The survey pointed out the family life of these women in 'khaki' suffers as there have been cases of infertility and broken marriages. While women in border guarding forces say they have to remain away from home for a long time when posted in frontier areas, they are also unable to breastfeed their young ones due to duty timings and lack of support infrastructure. It added that the reasons for a woman personnel taking leave are, at times, 'deliberated and ridiculed'. Women police personnel work in stress and their efficiency is often blamed for. It is important that the government must leverage the differences (between a man and a woman) that will help them to prefer their work more effectively rather than the rigmarole of a woman being physically short and not capable to perform her work. For the first time women personnel across ranks and forces are demanding their rights as professional police officers having a female body. They are demanding, for gender -friendly equipments, fire arms designed with the body specifics of women, ergonomically designed uniforms etc etc.²³

The notable recommendations of the seventh National Conference of Women in Police are - to draft a new syncretic recruitment scheme that induces a greater gender balance in hiring pattern; greater investment in advertising, recruitment opportunities and career options for female officers; and designing advertisement campaign in a way that appeals to sensitivities of female candidates. The MHA directive to raise the representation of women in state police/ central armed police forces to thirty -three per cent must be pursued with greater vigour and earnestness. The conference emphasized on maintenance of work-life balance by stressing on eight hours work, job location as per preference to suit life-cycle, flexi-hours, job sharing for retaining trained manpower.

Use of technology for achieving work-life balance such as some assignments can be done from home by using technology. At the same time home can be supervised to some extent with the assistance of technology. There should be a budget like work-life harmony fund with five year commitment for appropriate training programmes (such as stress management programme, yoga, meditation, exercises etc), hiring of professional counselors, health advisors, mentors and coaches. Hundred per cent housing for women personnel particularly at the constabulary level including medical facility, education for children and transport, to and fro work place and home. Compulsory adoption by all states and UTs of the central government provision for six months maternity leave and child care leave up to two years; and mandatory weekly off. It has been recommended to make work of women police more visible and recognize their contribution as well as reward them. The conference recommended dedicated design cell in BPR & D for upgrading uniform and equipment required for police, that would take into account gender sensitive design; ergonomically designed uniform, dungarees, body protectors, BP vest, helmet, patka, crossbelt, shoes, raincoats, winter jackets, dungarees etc; gender specific fabric and colour such as anti-bacterial PT dress; gender sensitive design belt to be functional with handsfree options; size and weight of weapons to be gender friendly. In the conference, health and hygienic issues were also discussed. The conference recommended installation of sanitary pad dispensers and incineration disposal units at all possible places; portable / chemical toilets for law and order, traffic duties to be funded under the Swachh Bharat initiative. The government funded annual health-check up for all ranks of policewomen which includes pap smear, mammogram, calcium, vitamin D as well as bone density; mother milk storage banks in crèches; make hygiene and sanitation awareness a mandatory part of training; periodical gynaecologist and nutritionist sessions to be organized where women are deployed; research to be commissioned on gender related health issues to offer solutions based on data. The conference recommended an external independent body to enquire into

sexual harassment cases. Other general recommendations included having a nodal agency under the MHA to monitor cases related with human trafficking; open on-line platform for regular suggestions and feedback from women police personnel; gender budgeting utilization to be monitored.²⁴

Future Prospects

There is an urgent need to increase the strength of women in police in India. Police organization in India should have a mission for the optimum utilization of the inherent potentialities of women in police. For this, a clear cut planning has to be made. The need and requirement of women police in different sphere of work require prior assessment. For this, the police organization and the Home Secretariat of the respective states should work together to make a rough estimation of the number of women police required by the year 2020. It should also take into account (make a rough estimation) the number of women who will not be available for performing field duties as well as non-field duties due to maternity related reasons. Thus along with the present need of women police personnel, approximately the excess strength that may be required should be calculated and then vacancies should be announced. It is necessary to increase the numerical strength of women police in all ranks especially at the decision making level (at the middle and senior management level). and infrastructural facilities should be improved for women in police.

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Abbreviations:

- BSF: Border Security Force
- CDTS: Central Detective Training School
- CISF: Central Industrial Security Force
- CPO: Central Paramilitary Organization
- LNJNNICFS: Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan National Institute of Criminology and Forensic Science
- MHA: Ministry of Home Affairs
- SSB: Sashastra Seema Bal
- SVPNPA: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy

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