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Women in Police: Employment Status and Challenges

Introduction

India is a federal, democratic and an active civil society of the world. The Constitution of India embodies and reflects certain basic values, philosophy and objectives. The values expressed in our Preamble are sovereignty, socialism, secularism, democracy, republican character, justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, human dignity, and unity and integrity of the nation (Mohapatra, 2011). In addition to them, the Constitution promotes overall human development. The goals of human development are closely associated with the development and empowerment of women, who, according to the Census 2011, represent 48.46 per cent of the total population of India.¹ Although, gender equality, justice and non-discrimination to all citizens are assured by the Constitution of India, the gender inequality index of India was 0.617 in 2011.² Clearly, India has a long way to go to realize the dream of gender equality (Sharma, Sharma and Kaushik, 2011).

The socio-economic development of women is very vital for the sustained growth of a nation. The industrial revolution and the processes of liberalization and globalization have changed the position of women in India. As a result, women are actively participating in various economic activities, and

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¹ *Provisional Population Totals, Paper 1 of 2011 India, Series 1, Data Products 2011–India*, Table 1, (New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011). Available online at: http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov_results_paper1_india.html and http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/table_1.pdf.

² *Human Development Report 2011, Human Development Statistical Annex*. "Table 4: Gender Inequality Index and Related Indicators", p. 141. Available online at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2011_EN_Tables.pdf.

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simultaneously managing their family and work life. Their traditional role of home-maker has been transformed into the new role of a professional woman. In India, a number of women have successfully broken the glass ceiling and attained top positions, like Mrs. Indira Gandhi (first female Prime Minister of the country), Mrs. Pratibha Patil (first female President of the country), Ms. Naina Lal Kidwai (first Indian woman to lead a foreign bank, HSBC), Ms. Chanda Kochchar (first female MD and CEO of the country's largest private sector bank, ICICI), Ms. Kanchan C. Bhattacharya (first female DGP of Uttaranchal state), Ms. Sonali Banerjee (first female merchant navy officer), Ms. Kiran Bedi (first female IPS officer) and many more. Apart from these examples, it is also important to remember the active role played by women during our freedom struggle to gain Independence from British colonial rule. Even so, women are often viewed as "the weaker sex"; and it is believed that their characteristics are not suited to fit the requirements of certain jobs, especially in male-dominated professions.

Policing is considered to be one of the most masculinized occupations of the world. It has been described as one of the most "gendered" professions (Butler, Winfree and Newbold, 2003), particularly agreeable to traditional male gender characteristics; one where, it is believed, women have been slow to enter (Leger, 1997). Policing is a demanding job, which involves long and uncertain hours of duty (Sahgal, 2007). However, over the past few decades, the police workforce has grown much more diverse with regard to gender and race (Sklansky, 2006). In India, while all the postings and ranks in the police are common to both men and women,³ women are still under-represented in the police force and are not assigned to field missions to the same extent as men.

Although numerous research studies have been conducted relating to different aspects of women in the police—for instance, growth and development of women in the police (Surender, 2010); their career aspirations, motivations and gender discrimination (Sahgal, 2007); their job expectations and adjustments (Pattanaik and Worley, 2011); their role in police and administration (George, 2011; Mahajan, 1982); and how they deal with domestic violence and disputes (Natarajan, 2006)—there is hardly any study which focuses on their employment status and the challenges faced by them in the police. Thus, the present paper is an attempt to bridge this critical gap in research. The main objectives of the study were as follows:

³ Available online at: www.bprd.nic.in.

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- To examine the employment status of women in the police.
- To study the challenges faced by women in the police.

Employment Status of Women in Police

According to a brochure on the status of women, “women do more than 67 percent of the total hours of work done in the world but they earn only 10 percent of the world’s income and own only 1 percent of the world’s property (p.1).”⁴ In India, women are often referred to as the secondary earner in the family. It is generally believed that unlike for men, a professional career is not a must for women. Though the government claims to be doing a lot for the upliftment and empowerment of women, data on women’s employment reveals that there is a long way to go. Table 1 presents data pertaining to the male and female workforce in India’s organized sector during the period 1991–2010.

Table 1: Employment Trends in the Male and Female Workforce in India’s Organized Sector, 1991–2010

(Lakh persons as on 31 March each year)

Year	1991	Per Cent	1995	Per Cent	2000	Per Cent	2005	Per Cent	2010	Per Cent
Men Employed	229.52	85.86	232.97	84.64	230.37	82.39	214.42	81.04	228.49	79.59
Women Employed	37.81	14.14	42.28	15.36	49.23	17.61	50.16	18.96	58.59	20.41
Total	267.33	100.00	275.25	100.00	279.60	100.00	264.58	100	287.08	100.00

Source: *Economic Survey, 2011–12, Statistical Appendix*, Table 3.1, p. A-52 (New Delhi: Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India, 2011). Available online at: www.indiabudget.nic.in/es2011-12/estat1.pdf.

Table 1 shows that the share of women in the organized sector workforce has increased from 14.14 per cent to 20.41 per cent, while the proportion of men has decreased from 85.86 per cent to 79.59 per cent during 1991–2010. According to the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD, 2012: 13, Table 1.1), as on 1 January 2011, the actual strength of the women police

⁴ *The Status of Women: A Reality Check; Facts on Inequality and Crimes Against Women* (Kolkata: Swayam, n.d.). Available online at: www.swayam.info/swayam_gi_leaflet_31mar.pdf.

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personnel in the actual total state police force was only 4.59 per cent. The ratio of women personnel to men personnel works out to 1: 21. Table 2 presents data pertaining to the male and female workforce in the Indian police during 1991–2010.

Table 2: Employment Trends in Male and Female Personnel in the Indian Police, 1991–2010

(As on 31 December each year)

Year	1991	Per Cent	1995	Per Cent	2000	Per Cent	2005	Per Cent	2010	Per Cent
Men in Police	11,38,932	98.82	12,34,996	98.72	12,76,075	98.40	12,99,339	96.76	15,07,659	95.40
Women in Police	13,654	1.18	16,014	1.28	20,688	1.60	43,519	3.24	72,652	4.59
Total	11,52,586	100	12,51,010	100	12,96,763	100	13,42,858	100	15,80,311	100.00

Source: Data compiled from the relevant chapters on police strength in the annual *Crime in India Statistics* reports issued by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, during 1991–2010.

Table 2 shows that the proportion of women in the Indian police has increased from 1.18 per cent in 1991 to 4.59 per cent in 2010, which is a very insignificant increase. Table 3 shows the growth of the Indian police force along with the growth of the women police force during 2001–2010. It can be seen that only in the years 2002 and 2009, the growth of women in the Indian police was quite satisfactory, i.e., 39.22 per cent and 25.10 per cent, respectively; while during 2005 and 2008, there was negative growth.

A number of states in India (for instance, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Punjab) have established all-women police stations (AWPS), which are managed and run exclusively by women police personnel. This is because women generally feel more comfortable about approaching police stations manned by women, rather than regular police stations, especially for women-related problems—like dowry harassment, sexual harassment, assault, bigamy, eve-teasing and violation of protection orders under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. According to BPRD (2012: 27–35, Table 2.6), as of 1 January 2011, 442 women police stations in the country were exclusively run and managed by women police personnel. Table 4 indicates the increase in the number of women police

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stations in India during 2005–2011. It shows that a total of 144 new women police stations were opened during this period.

Table 3: Growth of Indian Police Force and Women in Indian Police, 2001–2010

Year	No. of Police Personnel	No. of Women Police Personnel	Proportion of Women Police Personnel (Per Cent)
2001	13,08,010	23,889	1.83
2002	13,08,971 (0.07)	33,259 (39.22)	2.54
2003	13,11,516 (0.19)	39,387 (18.42)	3.00
2004	13,37,183 (1.95)	45,016 (14.29)	3.36
2005	13,42,858 (0.42)	43,519 (-3.32)	3.24
2006	14,06,021 (4.70)	51,464 (18.25)	3.66
2007	14,25,181 (1.34)	56,286 (9.36)	3.94
2008	14,73,595 (3.39)	52,322 (-7.04)	3.55
2009	15,57,497 (5.69)	65,456 (25.10)	4.20
2010	15,80,311 (1.46)	72,652 (10.99)	4.59

Source: Data compiled from the relevant chapters on police strength in the annual *Crime in India Statistics* reports issued by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, during 2001–2010.

Note: Figures within parentheses indicate the growth rate in per cent.

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Table 4: Women Police Stations in India

(As on 1 January each year)

Year	No. of Women Police Stations
2005	298
2006	326
2007	328
2008	330
2009	342
2010	397
2011	442

Source: Annual reports on *Data on Police Organizations in India* published by BPRD, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India. Years consulted: 2006 to 2012.

Major Challenges Faced by Women in the Police Profession

Discussed in the sections below are the major challenges faced by women employees in the Indian police:

Challenges Within the Police Profession

Gender Discrimination

Gender-based work differences are perceived to be much greater in male-dominated professions like the police and the armed forces than in traditionally female-dominated vocations like teaching and nursing (Sahgal, 2007). Masculinized occupations are more valued by society, and men in such occupations are rewarded and paid more compared to their female counterparts (Niland, 1996). Policing is one of the most masculinized occupations in the world, where women face a number of discriminations and hardships because of their gender. They are generally not given important roles, nor the opportunity to handle critical jobs, depriving them from earning recognition and sharing power (Sahgal, 2007). Women are not positioned on mainstream police tasks. Often, they are placed as either a telephone operator or a typist in the department, or given the job of escorting women prisoners, or investigating minor offences

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against women and children; sometimes, they are even asked to cook in the police mess. Further, women police personnel are also discriminated against while sanctioning different incentives. However, the reality is that most women in the police (except those who want to escape from hardships) want to be treated at par with their male counterparts so that they get a fair opportunity to prove their worth. Women police personnel demand the same selection criteria, training standards, incentives and work schedules as those applicable to their male counterparts.

Sexual Harassment and Organizational In-Civility

Sexual harassment and organizational in-civility affect the dignity and performance of women personnel in any profession. Sexual harassment introduces stress. The cost of stress for employees are mainly physical and psychological illnesses, including depression and job dis-satisfaction; while the costs for employers are mainly absenteeism, job attrition and deterioration in productivity (Gohlipour et al., 2011). The degree of sexual harassment at the workplace has reached alarming proportions (Steph, 2006). Even in the police department, women employees are not safe. For example, on 14 January 2011, a head constable in a police training school in Kohlapur sexually molested a trainee women constable during a training session.³

Prejudices and Biases of Male Police Personnel

The capabilities and abilities of women in the police have not been recognized by their male counterparts. Women employees are not accepted as full professional colleagues by their male co-workers. Although policewomen are expected to perform tasks and roles similar to those of policemen, there are differences in terms of the women's motivation levels as well as the negative attitudes of their male counterparts and decision-makers (Sahgal, 2007). Male police personnel usually fail to appreciate their counterparts because they have a number of misconceptions about the capabilities of women in the police. It is believed that women lack the physical strength, stamina, height and weight to deal with thugs and brawls (Niland, 1996). Even where women are well-qualified and experienced, the predominance of males has resulted in a culture where male behaviour patterns are perceived to be the norm, and women often find it difficult to be accepted as equals by their male colleagues (Steph, 2006).

³ Available online at: http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_sexual-harassment-scandal-rocks-kohlapur-cops_1536568.

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Male police personnel believe that women in the police should be given only specific tasks relating to women and children; they should be given the task of cooking in the police mess; they should escort only female prisoners; and they should not be engaged in operations against militants. In short, the male workforce still believes that there is no need to integrate women employees into mainstream policing.

Role Ambiguity and Role Conflicts

With the increase in the number of women in the police, issues like role conflicts or multiple roles and role ambiguity have got aggravated. Role ambiguity and multiple roles result in increased stress (Jacobs and Schain, 2009). Most women in the police are confused about the way they should conduct themselves. If they behave lady-like, their acceptance amongst male colleagues is low. On the other hand, their active participation in casual repartees carries the danger of losing their colleagues' respect (Suman, 2010). There is evidence of both inter-role and intra-role conflicts occurring among women who join the police force. Policewomen underachieve as patrol officers, often falling into cycles of de-motivation and failure. They accept stereotypical roles, display low work commitment and seek non-patrol assignments (Christie, 1996).

Corruption

Although corruption in the police department is not a new phenomenon, the irony is that the issue has seldom been seized by the organization with a sense of seriousness. It is often found that the general working environment, poor salaries and the lack of financial incentives force public servants to adopt corrupt practices to make both ends meet (Thomas, 2003). It is corruption that is increasingly eating into the vitals of police professionalism (Samanta, 2003). Thus, it is a huge challenge for women police personnel to work with full honesty and dignity in a corrupted and compromised environment.

Inadequate Strength (Tokenism)

Policewomen emerge as tokens in a male-dominated occupation (Christie, 1996) notwithstanding the fact that their representation in the police department is very necessary for addressing gender-related issues on a priority basis and ensuring support to women victims of violence as well as protecting their rights. Rosabeth Kanter's theory of tokenism, delineated in her seminal work *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), argues that once tokens reach a tipping point of 15 per cent representation in the workplace, they begin to experience

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fewer workplace problems; otherwise, the members of a token group are likely to have negative experiences at the workplace as a result of their low numerical representation (see also Stichman, Hasselland and Archbold, 2010). Krimmel and Gormley (2003) found that female officers working in police agencies with less than 15 per cent representation in their department reported that they would take up a new job, were less satisfied with their job, would not recommend a career in law enforcement to a friend, would not do the job again if given the choice, felt tired, and felt that their jobs were less important than did female officers working in police agencies where there was a higher proportion of female officers (more than 15 per cent). In India, women in the police have consistently been under-represented. In 2001, the share of women in the police was only 1.83 per cent, increasing to merely 4.59 per cent in 2010 (see Table 3).

Problems of Co-ordination

Historically, women's abilities have always been underestimated; they have been confined to certain roles and responsibilities, and have been prohibited from full participation in a host of fields (Hipp and Rizo, 2010). Although they have been present in the law enforcement profession, they are often placed in the women's cell or the suvidha centre (citizen-government interface), denying them full equality with their male counterparts. Even when women have been given full policing powers, they have not been able to completely utilize these powers. This creates problems of co-ordination both among women personnel and between the women police personnel and their male counterparts.

Challenges Posed by Women's Personality Traits

Difference in Leadership Style

Most studies on leadership have found that there are differences between men and women in the way they lead. As expected, within the police organization, women are under-represented at the leadership level (Osterlind and Haake, 2010). Leadership is a major factor which poses a challenge to women in the police (Steph, 2006). Women are perceived to be more people-oriented because of their socialization; they are meant to exhibit more democratic, participative, holistic and interactive styles of leadership, while men are thought to be more task-oriented (Jacobs and Schain, 2009). Women tend to focus more on good relations, open communication, dialogue and group dynamics. It is believed that the people-oriented leadership style of women is less likely to inspire

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productivity among police personnel. Women, in all civil societies of the world, are regarded as nurturers and peace-makers who resolve conflicts before they become major issues. These characteristics are considered as soft and ineffective and tagged as "feminine" style of leadership (Osterlind and Haake, 2010). In the policing profession, situations commonly arise when an autocratic leadership style is absolutely essential.

Low Acceptance and Poor Comfort Level

Women in the police have not been fully accepted by their male counterparts. Many men in the police service are not comfortable with women colleagues or subordinates; show a tendency to not recruit women as colleagues or subordinates; and do not take women's opinions and ideas seriously (Sahgal, 2007). Most women police personnel feel that their presence amongst their male counterparts tends to make the environment 'formal and stiff'. The mutual comfort level between men and women colleagues in the police is very low (Suman, 2010).

Lack of Job Satisfaction

A satisfied workforce is a critical component to an organization's ability to provide services both effectively and efficiently. There are various reasons for women joining the police. Among them, job security, responsibility, respect and recognition, promotion opportunities and pay are the most common factors. However, most women in the police are not satisfied with their promotion opportunities and working conditions (Sahgal, 2007; Grogan, 2008). Thus, it is understandable that women police personnel who are less satisfied with their jobs will be less motivated to perform the necessary tasks, have lower productivity, more absences and higher turn-over intentions.

Challenges Outside the Workplace

Balancing Career and Family Life

The twin demands of career and family affect both men and women, but it is the women who most often carry the major responsibilities within the home (Bush and Middlewood, 1997; cited in Steph, 2006). With women playing the "dual roles" of managing home and career, they face greater challenges in striving for balance between their duties at home and the responsibilities at work (Washington, 2011). Policing being a multi-faceted profession, striking a proper balance between work and family responsibilities is one of the biggest

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challenges for women in the police. They sometimes have to reduce their time at the workplace. As a result, men often have an edge over their female counterparts in advancing at the workplace (ibid.). On the other hand, if women attain top positions in their departments, they are under more stress than men because of their dual roles.

Technological Advancement

The rapid advances in science and technology during the last 50 years have introduced far-reaching changes in all spheres of life, including how people live and work, better access to the media and the latest technologies, and significantly higher educational levels that afford greater work opportunities. All these changes have re-defined the workplace for women in general as well as in the police. The advances in science and technology have placed superior tools not only in the hands of police personnel but also in the hands of criminals, who consequently become more lethal, more precise and more difficult to catch (Samanta, 2003). Women police personnel who have been appointed on a priority basis and are not highly educated or qualified find it difficult to adapt to the latest technological advancements in their field.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Women in the police are under-utilized and under-employed. In 2010, the proportion of women in the organized sector of India was 20.41 per cent, while the proportion of women in the total police force was only 4.59 per cent. Gender discrimination is a major reason for this under-utilization. Gender differences should not be used to justify negative discrimination or to discourage women from effectively contributing to the organization (Sahgal, 2007). Moreover, women's lack of awareness of their genuine rights, their acquiescence in the bullying tactics at the workplace, and conformity to the traditional roles defined by society have kept them in a passive position (Gohlipour et al., 2011). Men and women have different personality traits and behaviour patterns. If these differences are managed with proper understanding and care, they are helpful in creating an excellent work environment within the police organization. However, both the lack of sensitivity and over-sensitivity of the government and the male police personnel have made women in the police psychologically weak. The government should formulate and strictly implement policies that guarantee genuine equality between the male and female workforce in the police departments. Various training programmes, seminars, courses and workshops should be organized by the authorities concerned to change the attitude of the

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male police personnel and society at large. Women in the police should also recognize their endurance, strength and capabilities to handle tough situations in an effective way.

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