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A Model Policy for Women in the Police

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*(This editorial is based on the article '**A Model Policy for Women in the Police**' which appeared in "The Hindu" on 14th March, 2019. The article talks about participation of women in the Police departments and the challenges faced by them.)*

Women in Independent India have evolved with the flow of history, but it has only been over the last 35 years that they have experienced the post-industrial revolution and subsequent positives of globalisation.

These developments have radically transformed their gender relations at home, the workplace, with peers, and possibly in society at large, quite similar to the kind of social transformations women in the US experienced in the 1960s.

The Indian woman ever since has come a long way in being part of the active workforce and has possibly broken all barriers in most professional fields, including that of donning the uniform of the **Police and the Para-Military**.

However, this is not enough. The discourse on mainstreaming women in the police by making policing inclusive, non-discriminatory and efficient in India is missing in policy circles.

Unwomanly Police Department: the case in point

- While the number of women in the police forces nationally has grown in India, it remains just over 7 per cent of the total strength of the police department.
- There is a wide variation between the States, with 12 per cent of Tamil Nadu's police force being women as against less than 1 per cent in Assam. This is despite the fact that 12 States have over the years passed rules setting a quota of 30 per cent or more for women in the police force.
- The chronicle of women in Indian police started in the early 70s when woman began joining the uniformed force. During those decades, thousands of women joined the force from the ranks of constable all the way across the spectrum.

- The Police in India have recruited a decent number of women over the last twenty years, but acceptability and assimilation as “equal partners” to men within the professional core has left much to be desired.
- The meagre representation highlights the fact that women in uniform are still perceived as **“they” versus “us” in all ranks and files of the uniformed profession.**

Challenges Grappling the System

- Decisions on deployment of women are not free of gender stereotyping restricting women from leading operational positions. This biasness is not limited only from male colleague sometimes female superiors too consider them weak, less willing to work and less tough.
- There appears to be a tendency to sideline women, or give them policing tasks that are physically less demanding, or relegate them to desk duty, or make them work on crimes against women alone.
- Women police persons are relegated to dealing with crimes against women and accompanying women prisoners the concept works against the interests of women as it segregates them.
- Current data reveal that most women in the police are concentrated in the lower ranks reflecting the dearth of females at key operational positions.
- The police department suffers from gender apathy as evident through the absence of separate toilets, changing rooms for women, and separate accommodation for women, and other facilities and child-care support, in addition to persistent and widespread gender bias.

Gender Neutral Policing

- The very presence of women could create an environment for women to access police stations with less diffidence and difficulty.
- International research illustrates that women police and enforcement officers utilise a different feminine policing style — relying less on physical force and more on communications skills — to control potentially violent or conflict situations, and which are therefore less likely to escalate into excessive force or uncontrolled situations.
- The under-representation of women at all levels in any progressive and modern police agency negatively impacts the culture and operational efficiency of law enforcement agencies and throughout that community or country in which it prevails.
- Today, in India, crime against women is at an all-time high, and socially-destructive and exploitative practices such as dowry, molestation, sexual assault, and coercion are common. The cases often go unreported as the victim at times suffers from the insensitivity perpetrated by male officials who lacks sensitization. More women in the system can help address this problem.

The Impetus Required

- There is a need to have more women in the field in executive postings – from constables to inspectors and higher ranks.
- Departments should undertake special recruitment drives in every district to ensure geographical diversity.
- The police should reach out to the media and educational institutions to spread awareness about opportunities for women in the police.
- Women in the constabulary must get the training, support and confidence needed to put them on a par in every sense with their male counterparts.
- A common gender-neutral cadre needs to be created for all ranks so that promotional opportunities are evenly available.
- Resource centres for mentoring, creating awareness about opportunities and prospects, and helping with career planning and training and coping with workplace challenges are essential.
- While women have a role in making up for the lack of training and sensitisation of the force in general in dealing with crimes against women they should not be ghettoised into dealing only with such crimes.
- Women do have some special needs, like during and post pregnancies, which need to be catered to. They shouldn't be shunted to non-executive postings. The force needs to encourage more women to be in the field.
- Most State police departments have received funds under the Modernisation of State Police Forces Scheme for providing separate toilets and changing rooms for women, and for constructing separate accommodation for women with attached toilets in all police stations and units. Police departments must ensure the best use of this fund.
- Police departments must also ensure safe working spaces for women and adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination and harassment, in order to make policing a viable career option for women.
- Departments must operationalise the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013**.

Way Forward

- While more women are urgently needed in the police forces, the numbers alone will not be enough without equity.
- To counter the prevalence of sexist attitudes within the bureaucracy and police, an organisational response from the force is needed to enable women to realise their full potential.
- Integrating women in the force should become an essential component of the process of police reform in India, enabling them to become **Real Agents of Change**.
- **More women in the force is not only an expression of the formal fulfilment of sexual equality but it is also about achieving a true Lebensraum- a space**

conducive for natural development.