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An Analysis of Gender Representation and Reforms in Indian Police System: Issues, Challenges and Way ahead

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ABSTRACT

The Indian police force is a crucial institution responsible for maintaining law and order across the diverse communities present in India. It serves as the primary point of contact for the common man in case of any mis happenings that occur in their day-to-day life. However, historically, it has been marred by gender disparities and inadequate representation of women. The Indian police system, a crucial pillar of law enforcement, has historically grappled with significant gender misrepresentation, marked by a profound imbalance in the representation of women within its ranks. Despite comprising a substantial proportion of the Indian population, women remain significantly underrepresented in the police force. This disparity is evident across various hierarchical levels, from entry-level positions to leadership roles, where women officers constitute a disproportionately low percentage of the total police system. Societal norms, cultural barriers, and systemic biases have contributed to this imbalance, limiting women's participation and advancement within law enforcement agencies. Addressing this gender misrepresentation is pivotal not only for fostering gender equality but also for enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of the police force in catering to the diverse needs of society.

This research paper delves into the complex dynamics of gender representation within the Indian police force from a political science standpoint. It examines the historical context, current challenges, and potential reforms necessary to achieve gender parity and enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement.

Keywords: *Police Reforms, Case Study of Gender-inclusive Policies in Police Force Globally, Gender Representation in Indian Police Force, Historical Context of Gender Representation in Indian Police.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian police force is a multifaceted law enforcement framework responsible for

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maintaining law and order across the country's diverse landscape. It comprises various branches, including the state police forces, central law enforcement agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), specialized units like the Rapid Action Force (RAF), and other paramilitary forces. The police force operates under the authority of both central and state governments, each having its own police establishment. The primary responsibilities of the police include crime prevention, investigation, maintaining public order, traffic regulation, and providing assistance during emergencies. The hierarchical structure typically involves officers at different levels, from constables and sub-inspectors to senior officers such as superintendents and commissioners. Challenges within the Indian police system encompass issues like inadequate resources, high workload, corruption, politicization, and at the forefront, gender-related problems such as underrepresentation of women officers and gender biases that persist within the institution. Addressing these challenges remains critical for enhancing the efficacy and responsiveness of the police force in serving the diverse needs of India's population. The main focus of this paper is to delve into the importance of the misrepresentation of women in the police force that hampers the overall development of the whole system as the no of victims are more from the marginlised section of society such as the females and the children. Thus, we need such a system that can cater to this section as the females and children are at the vulnerable section of the society and the system has much discriminatory representation from the women.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN POLICE

The history of gender representation in the Indian police system has evolved significantly over time, marked by gradual but notable changes in the participation and roles of women within law enforcement.³

- **Pre-Independence Era:** During British colonial rule, the presence of women in law enforcement was limited to certain roles like matrons or as part of women's units handling cases involving women and children. However, their involvement was restricted, and they had limited authority within the police force.
- **Post-Independence (1947-1970s):** After India gained independence in 1947, efforts were made to integrate women into the police force. In 1948, the Women's Police Corps was established, primarily dealing with cases involving women and children. Their roles were still confined to certain areas and were often seen as an auxiliary force rather than being integrated into mainstream policing.

³ Sinha, Anjana, "Policewomen in India: A long way to go". *The Hindu*, 2013, January, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/Policewomen-in-India-A-long-way-to-go/article20560424.ece>

- **1970s-1990s:** During this period, there was a gradual shift in perceptions regarding the roles of women in law enforcement. The number of women joining the police force increased, and efforts were made to diversify their roles beyond traditional assignments. However, they still faced significant challenges, including gender bias, discrimination, and limited opportunities for career advancement.
- **2000s-Present:** In the 21st century, there has been a visible emphasis on increasing the representation of women in the police force across India. Various state police departments started recruiting women in larger numbers and in various roles, including operational duties like patrolling, investigation, and intelligence gathering. The government introduced several initiatives to encourage women to join the police force and provided support for their training and career development.

Additionally, policies such as the 33% reservation for women in police forces in union territories and efforts to increase their representation in higher ranks have been introduced to promote gender equality within the law enforcement system.

III. CURRENT SCENARIO OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN POLICE

- **Proportion of Women in the Police Force:** According to data from the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), women constitute only around 10-12% of the total police force in India. ⁴ This percentage varies across different states and union territories, with some regions having a higher representation of women compared to others
- **Leadership Roles:** The representation of women in higher ranks within the police force is even lower. Senior positions such as Superintendent of Police (SP) or Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) are still predominantly held by men. As per reports, women make up only a small fraction of officers in senior leadership roles.
- **Statistics on Current representation of women in Indian Police force:-** Women constitute 11.7% of India's police forces, with Ladakh Police leading the states/UTs with a 28.3% women component even as J&K figures at the bottom of the table with just 3.3% women in its police organisation. According to data compiled by the Bureau for Police Research and Development, as on January 1, 2022, Andhra Pradesh had the second-highest percentage of women in

⁴ SACHDEVA, SEEMA, "AN UNFAIR REPRESENTATION: WOMEN IN POLICE FORCE"
". The Tribune, 29 December, 2023.

its police force (21.7%), followed by Chandigarh (21.6%), Bihar (21.2%) and Tamil Nadu (19.1%). States with least share of women in police are J&K (3.2%), Tripura (5.3%) and Meghalaya (5.9%). The home ministry has been impressing upon the states and UTs to increase the representation of women in their police forces to 33%.⁵

IV. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN OFFICERS IN THEIR ROLES

Women officers in the police force face a range of challenges that can significantly impact their working environment, career progression, and overall well-being. Some of the key challenges include:

- a. **Gender Discrimination and Stereotypes:** Women officers often encounter gender bias and stereotypes that undermine their capabilities within the male-dominated police culture. They might face resistance or skepticism from male colleagues, which can affect their credibility and opportunities for career advancement.⁶
- b. **Work-Life Balance:** Balancing work responsibilities with family obligations can be challenging for women officers and mostly at the low levels of the system. Long and irregular working hours, frequent transfers, and demanding operational duties can strain their personal lives, affecting their mental and physical well-being.
- c. **Safety Concerns:** Women officers might face specific safety concerns, especially when deployed in high-risk or challenging environments. The lack of adequate facilities, including separate restrooms or accommodation, can also contribute to feelings of insecurity. This discourages them to join the police force and sometimes hampers their overall career.
- d. **Limited Career Advancement Opportunities:** Despite their qualifications and capabilities, women officers often encounter barriers in climbing the career ladder. The representation of women in senior leadership positions remains low, leading to a glass ceiling effect that hampers their advancement prospects. There's always a dearth of opportunities for women as compared to the male counterpart.
- e. **Harassment and Hostile Work Environment:** Instances of harassment, both verbal and physical, are reported by women officers within the police force. This hostile work environment can lead to stress, anxiety, and a lack of job satisfaction,

⁵ "WOMEN FORM LESS THAN 12% OF INDIA'S POLICE FORCE: CENTRE". TIMES OF INDIA, DATED FEBRUARY 9, 2023, VISITED ON 18/12/2023.

⁶ Joshi, Suvarana (2015). "The State of Women in Police in India and the Discrimination Faced By Them." International Journal of Indian Psychology 2(4) DOI:10.25215/0204.101.

impacting their performance and morale. There have been many instances of harassment in their own working environment that demotivates them to either come into this service or to continue their services in such an hostile environment.

- f. Lack of Support and Mentorship:** The absence of adequate support systems or mentorship programs tailored to the needs of women officers can hinder their professional growth. The absence of role models and mentors can make it challenging for them to navigate through the hierarchical and male-centric structure of the police force. Proper support is thus needed so that their full potential can be realized.

V. FACTORS INFLUENCING GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE INDIAN POLICE FORCE

- a. Societal Norms and Perceptions:** Deep-rooted societal norms and stereotypes often dictate traditional gender roles, shaping perceptions about suitable professions for men and women. Policing, historically viewed as a male-dominated field, faces challenges in breaking away from these gendered stereotypes, impacting the representation of women in the force.⁷
- b. Recruitment Policies and Practices:** Recruitment policies, criteria, and procedures within law enforcement agencies might unintentionally favour male candidates. Requirements related to physical fitness, height, and other criteria might disadvantage or discourage women applicants, leading to lower representation.
- c. Workplace Culture and Discrimination:** The prevailing workplace culture within police departments may be unwelcoming or hostile to women officers. Instances of gender discrimination, harassment, and biases can create barriers to women's participation and career progression within the force.⁸
- d. Family and Societal Expectations:** Societal expectations regarding women's primary roles as caregivers and homemakers can influence their career choices. Family responsibilities, societal pressure, and safety concerns often dissuade women from pursuing law enforcement careers or continuing in the profession.
- e. Political will and government policies:** Government policies and directives

⁷ Tripathi, Saumya (2020). "Patriarchal beliefs and perceptions towards women among Indian police officers: A Study of Uttar Pradesh, India". *International Journal of Police Science and Management* 22(31):146135572090561. DOI:10.1177/1461355720905612

⁸ Ministry of Women & Child Development (2015, November). "Handbook on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace".

significantly shape the recruitment, training, and career advancement opportunities for women in the police force. A strong political will to enact policies promoting gender equality and inclusion can lead to initiatives like reservations or quotas for women in law enforcement, ensuring their representation. Governments allocate budgets and resources to law enforcement agencies. A strong commitment to gender equality might result in funding specific programs aimed at recruiting, training, and supporting women officers within the police force. Adequate resources can facilitate the creation of supportive infrastructure and facilities for women officers

- f. Resistance to change within the police institution:** Resistance to change within the police institution concerning gender misrepresentation is one of the major factors influencing the misrepresentation of women in the Indian police force.
- g. Traditional Gender Roles:** Law enforcement has historically been a male-dominated field. Resistance to change might arise due to traditional beliefs and stereotypes regarding gender roles, perpetuating the idea that policing is a "man's job."
- h. Organizational Culture:** Police departments often have a hierarchical and male-centric culture. Resistance might come from those who uphold these traditional values, perceiving gender diversity as a threat to the existing power structures and norms within the institution.
- i. Perceived Threat to Status Quo:** Some individuals might resist gender-inclusive initiatives due to fear of losing opportunities or privileges. They may perceive gender diversity as a threat to their status, position, or authority within the organization.
- j. Lack of Awareness or Understanding:** Resistance can arise from a lack of awareness or understanding of the benefits of gender diversity within law enforcement. Some individuals may not recognize the importance of diverse perspectives and experiences ineffective policing.
- k. Concerns about Competency:** There might be misconceptions or biases regarding the competency of women in certain operational roles within the police force. Resistance could stem from doubts about women officers' abilities to perform certain duties or handle challenging situations.

VI. PROPOSED REFORMS FOR ENHANCING GENDER REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN POLICE

Several proposed reforms aimed at enhancing gender representation in the Indian police force have been discussed and considered in the past. These reforms primarily focused on modernization, equitable representation, and empowering women within the force and society. Some of these reforms include:

- **Recruitment and Quota Systems:** Proposals were made to introduce or expand reservation quotas for women in the police force. Implementing a certain percentage of reserved positions for women in recruitment could enhance their representation and create a more inclusive environment. Several states and union territories have approved this system for a minimum reservation for women at the constable to sub inspector levels.⁹
- **Policy Reforms:** Advocacy for policy changes to address gender-specific needs within law enforcement agencies was ongoing. This involved updating policies related to recruitment criteria, promotions, transfers, and providing support mechanisms for women officers.
- **Gender-Sensitive Training:** Emphasizing gender-sensitive training programs aimed at creating awareness about gender issues, improving sensitivity towards victims, and equipping officers with skills to address gender-based crimes effectively.¹⁰
- **Creating Supportive Work Environments:** Proposals included creating a supportive work environment with facilities tailored to the needs of women officers. This involved providing adequate infrastructure such as separate restrooms, changing rooms, and accommodation to ensure their safety and comfort.
- **Community Engagement and Awareness:** Proposed reforms aimed at fostering community engagement to change societal perceptions about women in law enforcement. This involved awareness campaigns, encouraging more women to consider law enforcement as a viable career option, and emphasizing the importance of gender diversity in policing.

⁹ 2015, March, 21. "Centre clears 33% quota for women in Delhi Police". *Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/centre-clears-33-quota-for-women-in-delhi-police/articleshow/46640889.cms>

¹⁰ National Commission for Women (1993). "Need for Gender Sensitization in Police". <http://ncw.nic.in/sites/default/files/Gender%20Sensitization%20of%20Police%20Officers.pdf>

- **Utilizing Technology and Modernization:** Leveraging technology and modernization in policing to create a more inclusive and efficient system. This could involve using technology for reporting and addressing gender-based crimes, improving communication systems, and ensuring the safety of women officers during operations.
- **Flexible Work Policies:** Introducing flexible work policies that accommodate the diverse needs of women officers, including options for part-time work, flexible schedules, and provisions for maternity and parental leave.

VII. INTERSECTIONALITY AND ITS RELEVANCE IN POLICE REFORMS

Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and other aspects of identity as they overlap or intersect, creating interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. The relevance of Intersectionality in Police Reforms can be understood by the following points:¹¹

- **Understanding Diverse Experiences:** Intersectionality emphasizes that individuals' experiences and vulnerabilities are shaped not by a single identity but by the intersections of various identities. For instance, a woman belonging to a marginalized community might face distinct challenges compared to a man from a privileged background within the police force. Recognizing these intersecting identities helps in understanding the diverse experiences of officers and citizens.
- **Addressing Bias and Discrimination:** Police reforms must consider how biases and discrimination based on intersecting identities affect interactions between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve. Intersectional perspectives shed light on how biases related to race, gender, class, and other identities can lead to differential treatment, profiling, or disproportionate use of force by police.
- **Inclusivity and Representation:** An intersectional approach underscores the importance of inclusivity and representation within law enforcement agencies. Reforms should focus on recruiting and promoting officers from diverse backgrounds to ensure a police force that reflects the demographics and experiences of the communities they serve.

¹¹ Nedera, Steliana (2023). "*What is Intersectionality? And why is it important for gender equality?*". UNDP, https://www.undp.org/bosnia-herzegovina/blog/what-intersectionality-and-why-it-important-gender-equality?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiA1rSsBhDHARIsANB4EJau8gONXxfmgJPNXjsq6-7MkH2XnHABwqXehEcQbFclfy2Q7vLAzUaAhFdEALw_wcB, accessed on 12/12/2023.

- **Policy Development and Implementation:** Policies and reforms need to be crafted with an intersectional lens, considering the multifaceted needs of different communities. For instance, reforms addressing community policing, use of force policies, or training modules should acknowledge and address the complexities arising from intersecting identities.

VIII. CASE STUDIES HIGHLIGHTING SUCCESSFUL GENDER-INCLUSIVE POLICIES IN LAW ENFORCEMENT GLOBALLY

- **Sweden: Gender Equality in the Police Force:** Sweden has been a frontrunner in promoting gender equality in its police force. The country implemented a gender mainstreaming strategy that aimed at achieving equal representation of men and women in law enforcement. Through targeted recruitment campaigns and affirmative action, Sweden significantly increased the number of women in the police force. Women now hold higher ranks, including leadership positions within the Swedish police.¹²
- **United Kingdom: Gender Diversity Initiatives in Metropolitan Police:** The Metropolitan Police Service (Met Police) in London, UK, introduced initiatives to enhance gender diversity and inclusivity within the force. This included setting up dedicated networks and support groups for women officers. The Met Police implemented flexible work policies, mentoring programs, and leadership development initiatives tailored for women officers. These efforts helped in increasing the retention and career progression of female officers.¹³
- **Canada: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP):** The RCMP undertook significant reforms to address gender inclusivity issues within its ranks. The force actively encouraged more women to join by emphasizing the importance of diversity and actively recruiting women officers. Policies were put in place to ensure a supportive work environment for women officers, including initiatives to prevent harassment and discrimination. The RCMP focused on improving work-life balance, maternity leave policies, and providing equal opportunities for advancement.¹⁴

¹² LFQVIST, Louise, (2014). "Gender change and Constants. The Case of Swedish Police and Gender Equality Policy". Conference: XVIII ISA World Congress of Sociology.

¹³Third Annual Report (2021). "Gender Equality in UK Policing". <https://www.heforshe.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/HeForShe%20Gender%20Equality%20Report%20v4%2028LR%29.pdf>

¹⁴ B Perrott, Stephen, 2021. "The recruitment of women and visible minorities into Canadian police forces: Should we expect further progress?". Sage Journals, Volume 96, Issue 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032258X211032106>.

- **Norway: Norwegian Police Service:** Norway has taken strides in ensuring gender balance and inclusivity within its police force. The country has focused on creating a culture of diversity and equality through various measures, including quotas for women in recruitment. Efforts were made to address stereotypes and biases within the force, with emphasis on promoting a more inclusive work environment. Women hold leadership positions within the Norwegian Police, contributing to a more balanced and diverse leadership structure. ¹⁵

These case studies demonstrate that successful gender-inclusive policies in law enforcement involve a combination of targeted recruitment strategies, supportive work environments, leadership development programs, and a commitment to creating a culture of equality and diversity within police forces

IX. FUTURE PROSPECTS

Addressing resistance to change within the police institution: Strategies include:

- Engaging in dialogue and awareness campaigns to educate about the importance of gender diversity in policing.
- Implementing diversity training and sensitization programs to challenge biases and promote inclusivity.
- Establishing support systems and mentorship programs to assist women officers in career development.
- Reviewing and reforming institutional policies and practices to ensure equity and fairness for all officers.
- Encouraging leadership buy-in and commitment to fostering an inclusive and diverse work environment.

Importance of gender representation in law enforcement

The Indian police force, one of the largest law enforcement agencies globally, plays a pivotal role in maintaining law and order across diverse regions and communities. However, this institution has long grappled with gender-related problems, depicting a significant imbalance in the representation of women within its ranks. Despite efforts to diversify and modernize, women remain notably underrepresented in the police force. The issues surrounding gender in the

¹⁵ Annual Report 2019, “*Implementing Norway’s National Action Plan 2019-2022, Women, peace and security*”.
Norwegian Ministries,
https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departmentene/ud/dokumenter/rapporter/wps_report2019.pdf

Indian police system are multi-faceted and complex, stemming from societal norms, cultural barriers, and systemic biases. These challenges manifest at various levels, from recruitment and retention to the limited opportunities for women to ascend to higher positions within the hierarchy. Discrimination, stereotyping, and inadequate support mechanisms further compound the problem, deterring women from pursuing careers in law enforcement. Addressing these gender-related challenges is essential not just for promoting gender equality but also for creating a more inclusive and effective police force that can better cater to the diverse needs of society.¹⁶

X. CONCLUSION

Thus, from the above statements and analysis, we can conclude that there is a long history of gender misrepresentation in the police force in India. This issue needs to be addressed as soon as possible because the rate and the character of crime have been changing with time and nowadays there is a huge demand for women to be at the forefront of the police force to address crime, especially regarding women and the weaker sections of the society. Most of the crimes in our society involve women whereas the police force is still dominated by male members, hence, there is a mismatch that creates problems for the crime to be investigated and many times the criminals use this loophole in the system and roam freely without any hesitations. This also provokes them to commit the crime again and again. Thus, it is the need of the hour to address this issue and maintain a good balance in the system so that efficient working of the system and law and order can be maintained in the society.

¹⁶ Natrarajan, Mangal (2014). "Police Culture and the Integration of Women Officers in India". Sage Journals, Volume 16, Issue 2, <https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2014.16.2.333>