



An Appraisal Of The Status Of All-Women Police Stations In India With Special Reference To Manipur State

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ABSTRACT

Women in Police have been an emerging trend especially with the rise of crimes and violences against women on one end of the spectrum and increased involvement of women in crimes on the other end. In both the cases, there is an urgent need for recruitment of women in police for many reasons. Among the more urgent factors is the fact that the response of the traditional police to crimes against women is very unsatisfactory almost bordering on human rights violation. More often than not, traditional Police tries to act as mediators and often opt for out-of-court settlement which do not necessarily deliver justice to affected women. Furthermore, the atmosphere in the police station is not necessarily conducive to victimised women sharing their ordeals. Against these shortcomings of the Police, there is an urgent need to institutionalise police facilities manned by women police personnel only in the form of All-Women Police Stations. This will ensure that women victims of crime are given the requisite legal redressal in a conducive environment. Thus, the paper tries to find out the status of the All-Women Police Stations in Manipur.

Keywords: Women, All-Women Police Stations, Police, Crime against Women.

Introduction: All-Women Police Stations are developing across the country. The rise of crimes and violence against women have skyrocketed according to data from the latest National Crime Records Bureau. Battered women victims feel traumatised and are hesitant to approach police stations to lodge complaints due to the unfriendly atmosphere associated with police stations. Due to the extremely hostile environment of police stations, many women victims suffer in silence and most crimes against women go unreported. In this context, police stations manned only by women can be called All-Women Police Stations. Many studies have also shown the efficacy of these AWPS in effectively creating a conducive environment of women victims to share their ordeal and obtain legal redressal and justice (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Ahern & Ditmar, 2012 etc.). The need for developing women police units has been influenced by the increasing involvement of women in crime, delinquency, deviancy, and agitations. It has also necessitated the recruitment of suitably trained women police personnel equipped proficiently to deal with sensitive problems relating to juvenile delinquency and maladjustment. There is no doubt to argue that specific crimes such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, eve teasing etc., crimes related to women can better handled by women police as compared to men (Iyer et.al., 2012). Furthermore, the general police response in cases of domestic violence has been that of non-intervention (Mukherjee, 2020). The traditional criminal justice delivery system in India is highly prejudiced when it comes to violence against women wherein such acts of violence have been given legitimacy under a Patriarchal social milieu. Consequently, women victims of domestic violence are advised to make adjustments. Instead of delivering justice, police act as mediators and try for an out-of-court settlement. Often, such victims are forced by police personnel to compromise with their husbands and in-laws. In cases of offences such as rape, the lack/absence of woman doctors delays the examination of the victim. In such a situation, women's cells or Women Police Stations are important prerequisites for providing female victims of crime enough confidence to approach the police for justice. Thus, those women who hesitate to speak in a regular police station can freely discuss their problems with women police personnel. Women police officers create a friendly environment conducive for the female victims of violence to express their grievances. It improves the quality of investigations involving women and juveniles, both victims and accused. The purpose of the women's cell / AWPS is to address specific problems of women, ranging from domestic violence to dowry harassment. It is believed that there is some natural

empathy between female police officers and rape victims that can provide better communication. Because of this, the victims may be more willing to cooperate, which could result in more efficient evidence-gathering (Wells & Alt, 2005).

Mangai Natarajan (2008), in her magnum opus, *Women Police in a Changing Society*, extensively studied the All-Women Police Stations in Tamil Nadu. All-Women Police Stations are a form of 'gendered model of policing' which emphasises the policing of women by women. Her study has testified that through All-Women Police Stations, the role of women in police can be harnessed and magnified to suit the demands of female offenders and victims alike. She further highlights that the prevalence and spread of All-Women Police Stations in Tamil Nadu is testimony to the success of such initiative. The AWPS offers a multitude of benefits encompassing the concerns of women police personnel and women victims as well. For the victims, they offer a safe and secure atmosphere where they can share their grievances, lodge complaints and seek legal help without fear and stigma often associated with traditional police (Glynn & Sen, 2015). For the women police personnel, such AWPS offer them the environment where they can harness their full potential leading to personal and professional growth. They can also work in a free and secure environment suited to their own preferences rather than navigating in a male-dominated police station. This 'gendered policing model' helps to utilise women police in building strong relations between the police and the community and can be regarded as the first step for promoting community policing. This 'separate but equal model' in the police can act as an interim stage towards full integration (ibid.).

Research Questions

1. What is the status of All-Women Police Stations in India?
2. What is the present status of the All-Women Police Stations in Manipur?

Objectives and Research Methodology

Crimes against women have increased exponentially. In order to effectively deal and mitigate such crimes, women police personnel as well as police stations manned only by women are the need of the hour. Several states across the country have made provisions to institutionalise All-Women Police Stations including Manipur. The paper tries to study the status of these police stations through indicators like strength, jurisdiction and infrastructure.

As far as the methodology is concerned, Women Police stations are taken as the unit of study and for this purpose, Imphal West and Thoubal District Women Police Stations are chosen for the study as these districts have highest strength of women police personnel. Observation and unstructured interviews are primarily employed as tools for data collection.

All-Women Police Stations: The Indian Scenario

In order to safeguard dignity of women victims of crime and women offenders and to ensure that their basic human rights are not violated, there is a need of special treatment in the form of assistance by women personnel when it comes to frisking or interrogation, or any other matter vis-à-vis such crimes. It is already stated that traditional police often disregard the concerns of women victims, although it may not be intentional. The traditional police set-up is designed to be hostile and intimidating to offenders and criminals. Law enforcement must be strict and emanate an aura of aggression against offenders and criminals to ensure that criminals do not go back to crime and that the harshest punishments are ensured whenever laws are broken. Even though this model has its validity in crime fighting, it has grossly ignored the plight of female victims and offenders alike. The need was felt to expedite the process of women-related cases. Due to the increase in crimes against women, the need was felt to create All Women Police Cells or Stations which dealt exclusively with women-related crimes. In contrast to general police stations, which deal with all kinds of cases, AWPS caters especially to women, thus ensuring early expediting of cases and a friendly environment where female victims can share their tales of woe. The state of Kerala boasts of the fact that it housed the first All-Women Police Station in the World in the year 1973 which was soon followed by Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in 1983 and 1989 respectively (BPRD, 2022). By the twenty-first century, almost all states in India have functioning All-Women Police Stations. According to latest Bureau of Police Research and Development data, the total number of All-Women Police Stations in India stands at 681 comprising of both rural and urban locations. Tamil Nadu has the highest number of All-Women Police Stations with 202 AWPS followed by Uttar Pradesh with 75 AWPS. Special mention may be made of the state of Maharashtra, which does not have a single AWPS even though it boasts a huge strength of female police personnel. Among the northeast states of the country, Nagaland and Meghalaya have the highest number of Women Police Stations, with 11 each.

All-Women Police Stations: Manipur Context

Violence against women has been on the rise in Manipur. Due to the fragile socio-political fabric of the state, Manipur has been witnessing violence against women. Years of turmoil, fake encounters and insurgency have rocked this tiny state. The situation is exacerbated due to the armed conflict prevailing in the state. Manipur's myriad issues are mired in history. Although we shall not delve into the nitty-gritty, it is sufficient to say that the state is plagued with extra-judicial killings, fake encounters and political unrest. As is natural, in any conflict situation, women and children often face the biggest brunt. In addition to physical danger, there is always the

possibility of getting one's modesty outraged in conflict situations. Since women are at the forefront of any socio-political unrest, there is an urgent need for adequate women police personnel. Although violence against women is rampant in the state, the official records do not reflect it. A reason for the skewed reporting of such violence may be due to the stigma associated with it and the discriminatory attitude towards women victims. Most women who face violence are either uneducated or illiterate. It is further exacerbated by our social and cultural ethos, which extols the suffering of women, and the more docile a woman is, the more she is appreciated. As such, many women are ill-advised by their relatives to refrain from lodging complaints. Another factor for low-case reporting is the unfriendliness and unpleasantness of the criminal justice system. Because the justice system in India, in general, and Manipur, in particular, is mired in red tape, many women go for an out-of-court settlement mainly through local vigilantes.

The Women's Justice Initiative of the Human Rights Law Network, Manipur, under its co-ordinator Nonibala Devi Yengkhom, have methodically argued for creation of mechanisms for the campaign on violence against women and have been advocating for systems of justice delivery characterised by compassion and parity. A team from the Human Rights Law Network examined the working of the All-Women Police Station in Assam and found that victims coming to such police facilities reported and shared their grievances without an iota of reluctance and hindrance. This is mainly due to the concerted efforts of the women police personnel manning such stations to create a safe atmosphere for such crime victims, empathetically hearing the grievances, and suggest measures to guide prompt justice delivery. Thus, All-Women Police Stations are the need of the hour. Table-1 depicts the present status of All Women Police Stations in Manipur.

The Table-1 indicates that all the nine districts of the old paradigm have well-established All Women Police Stations. For the newly created seven districts, the proposal for setting up All Women Police Stations has been sent to the Government of Manipur and

Table-1: All Women Police Station in Manipur.

Name of Police Station	Address	Establishment	Sanctioned Strength
Imphal West Women Police Station	Lamphei	16-01-2008	30
Imphal East Women Police Station	Porompat	16-01-2008	30
Thoubal Women Police Station	Thoubal	16-01-2008	30
Bishnupur Women Police Station	Bishnupur	16-01-2008	30
Chandel Women Police Station	Chandel	16-01-2008	30
Churachandpur Women Police Station	Churachandpur	16-01-2008	30
Tamenglong Women Police Station	Tamenglong	16-01-2008	30
Senapati Women Police Station	Senapati	16-01-2008	30
Ukhrul Women Police Station	Ukhrul	16-01-2008	30
Pherzawl Women Police Station	-	***	-
Tengnoupal Women Police Station	-		-
Noney Women Police Station	-		-
Kakching Women Police Station	-		-
Kangpokpi Women Police Station	-		-
Jiribam Women Police Station	-		-
Kamjong Women Police Station	-		-

Source: Field Work. ***Proposed, yet to be established.

Government notification is awaited. The Manipur Government has sanctioned 270 women police personnel for these All-Women Police Stations, and each AWPS has a minimum of thirty women police personnel. Each police station is headed by a lady police officer of the rank of Inspector who takes charge as the Officer-in-Charge of each police station. Each AWPS has one inspector, two Sub-inspectors, two assistant Sub-inspectors, four head constables, and twenty-one constables. All Women Police Stations are specially designed to cater to the needs of women victims. All Women Police Stations remove unnecessary red tape when it comes to lodging of complaints by aggrieved women. AWPS have a broader jurisdiction as compared to the traditional police station. A police station has jurisdiction only in a small area or a police circle. All Women's Police Stations have jurisdiction in the entire district. So, a victim can approach the AWPS in the district to which she belongs. In a regular police station, she can only approach such a station which serves her locality. Thus, AWPS can streamline the justice delivery process and remove much red tape, preventing aggrieved persons from getting justice. Simply put, AWPS has made reporting crimes and lodging complaints easier for female victims. Another advantage of All Women Police Stations is that victims do not have to stand in queues for extended periods like at general police stations. Unlike general police stations, women police personnel in AWPS listen to the grievances of the victims patiently and are given proper advice. Thus, AWPS can create a safe atmosphere and has, to some extent, removed the reluctance of women victims to approach the police stations. Although significant improvements have been made in the justice delivery system for aggrieved women victims of crime through the setting up of All Women Police Stations, the reality leaves a lot to be desired. These AWPS are fully functional only in the valley districts. The AWPS in hill districts exist only on paper and are simply non-functional. Even in the valley districts, the AWPS are short-staffed. Although in theory, thirty women personnel have been sanctioned, the reality is wide off the mark. There is a need for more resources, both

human and material. At times, there are no vehicles arranged to take the women victims to the forensic laboratory or the hospital. Also, infrastructural lacunae hinders the personnel from performing their duties duly. Acting Chairperson of the Manipur State Commission for Women, Tinningpham Monsang, has decried that women victims are having problems lodging complaints due to the shortage of women personnel in AWPS. Furthermore, the situation is grimmer in the hilly districts. As reported in local news daily, the number of crime cases is increasing in Tamenglong district in Manipur. Although Tamenglong has an AWPS in theory, it is still deprived of a women police station in reality. Due to the lack of a functional All Women Police Station at the district headquarters, controlling law and order is difficult, as women are at the forefront whenever a conflict arises.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it is clear that Policing is often regarded as one of the occupations least suited for women for a long time. After several decades of status quo, women have begun to opt for careers in police. Several factors led to this change, such as increased violence against women, better educational opportunities and changing socio-cultural values. An increase in women-related violence meant that women personnel were needed to attend to them. With better educational facilities, women have become more aware of their rights and are keen to explore new avenues. Finally, with the emergence of Western Feminism, women are challenging patriarchal mindsets and are more liberated than ever. From their first appointments as Police Matrons in the West, particularly in the United States and Western Europe, in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the saga of women in the police has come a long way. In the Indian context, the rise of extremism and the concomitant need to handle women agitators paved the way for the inception of a formal Women's Police. The first instance of women police in the truest sense of the term was in 1933 when the princely state of Travancore appointed ten special Police Constables and two Head Constables. Compared to the growth of women police in India, which started in the 1930s, women police as a formal organisation developed in Manipur only in the 1960s. It was necessitated mainly due to the need to handle women agitators and women-centric issues. Perhaps at the root of closing out of women to police is the ingrained notion that women are incapable of doing police work. Since its inception, physical strength has been seen as the most important requirement for the police. This is understandable as the situation demanded it during those times. It was basically institutionalised in order to check freedom fighters in British India. However, times and the type of crimes in society have changed. We have moved from the stone-age types of crimes to the more complex cyber and white-collar crimes. Physical strength is no longer essential when it comes to police as police calls for a gamut of expertise, of which physical strength is a minute aspect. There is also an increase in crimes and violence against women and children. All this entailed a change in the mindset of males and society. Women in police are no longer seen as misfits. Instead, they have come to be an integral part and parcel of the more excellent police network. Again, women have their own skill sets and areas of expertise, equally valuable for the police force. Thus, the growth of women police in the world in general and Manipur, in particular, has been a long and arduous journey involving changes both at the psychological and infrastructural levels.

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