

WOMEN POLICE ORGANIZATION IN TAMILNADU - A HISTORICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to highlight the role of women police organization in Tamil Nadu. India is a land of paradox in which opposites co-exist and contradictions thrive. On the one hand, our scriptures regard women as the goddess, the embodiment of love and affection. But on the other, she is in a subordinate position at home and society without an independent identity.¹ No wonder the Indian women constituting 48.2 per cent of the population remain and are treated as second-class citizens. Though Government of India and State Governments are taking many earnest steps gender equality is only on paper. Can we bring gender equality in our society Inducting more women in law enforcing departments is one of the ways to achieve gender equality in real sense. By gender and policing in Tamilnadu we mean the entry of women into policing, their employment and role in law enforcement, its history and development.

Key words : Women police wing, Women Commandos, All Women Battalion

Introduction

In India during a labour strike in Kanpur a large number of women workers who obstructed the work had to be lifted physically by policemen. This manhandling of women resulted in the need for policewomen force in Kanpur (UP.), which was started in 1938. But it is clear that before independence women were engaged for checking and conducting personal search of the women passengers in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras ports, But no woman was inducted as an integral part of the police force before independence. With the perceptive increase in the number of crimes committed against women as well as by women, states have realized the need for women police. It was realized that women themselves have to play positive roles in several sensitive areas of law enforcement related to women, The question of recruitment of women police received more attention in the seventies and eighties due to the support of the National Police Commission. In 1973 Kerala state took a progressive step of opening a police station to be manned exclusively by women.² In Madras city the women police wing was started on 27th December 1973 with the primary objective of assisting the policemen in dealing with the problems faced by them.³

Women Police Wing

Consisted of one Sub-Inspector one Head Constable and 20 women police The duties of women police at that time were

- a) Frisking of lady passengers at air ports
- b) Bandobust at festivals where ladies were expected to assemble
- c) Arresting of women and juvenile offenders
- d) Escorting of women and juvenile offenders to and from court

- e) checking of women offenders
- f) Traffic regulation near schools
- g) Accompanying raiding parties who raid brothels

In eighties there was a growing awareness of the need for women police, which resulted in increase in their employment.⁴ In 1982 the strength of women police was 82, consisting of 6 Sub Inspectors, 6 Head Constables and 70 Police Constables. ⁵ Besides their mentioned duties the women police were employed on regular beats on important railway stations like Madras Central and Egmore where they serve in "May I Help" squad and render assistance of varying nature to the general public.⁵ In 1992 the strength of women police was 179, consisting of 12 Sub Inspectors 26 Head Constables and 140 Police Constables.⁶

All Women Police Station

The real participation of Women in police force began from the year 1992 with the opening of All Women Police Station (AWPS). To deal with crime against women the then Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha opened the first AWPS at Thousand Lights, Chennai on 13.04.1992.⁷ The number was gradually increased to 57 by 1996 covering different districts of Tamilnadu. In 1997 as a result of equal opportunity legislation (30 per cent reservation), large number of women were recruited and placed in regular police battalion.⁸ In 2002 the number of AWPS was raised to 108 and the number of women police in Tamilnadu was 2054.⁹ In 2004, 188 AWPS are functioning all over with 4777 women police Most of these AWPS are located within general police stations.¹⁰

The AWPS would respond exclusively to complaints of sexual harassment, marital discord, eve teasing, trafficking, suicide, dowry harassment, child abuse, female infanticide etc. The women police would also deal with complaints under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971, the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights and Divorce) Act 1956 and Tarnilnadu Prohibition of Ragging Act (2002). Each AWPS has one Inspector, one Sub Inspector and 10 Constables. Mode of selection, recruitment and promotion are the same for both men and women. But these women police were not provided with weapons, vehicles and other equipments on par with men police. In 2001 the Government of Tamilnadu ordered that women police force should also be provided with weapons, vehicles and communication equipments for enhancing their ability and mobility in discharging their duties. 287 motorcycles and 40 jeeps were provided for the use of AWPS.¹¹

Women Help Line

The Tamilnadu government has launched a new scheme to aid women in distress called 'Women Help Line' unit 3. In all the 188 AWPS women help line service is provided to cover the entire Tamilnadu. Women police provide prompt help round the clock to women in distress in these Women Help Line Units.

Ideals of Helpline

- Render help with compassion
- Upliftment of women and children
- Provide relief to victims
- Provide legal advice to women in distress
- Provide self-confidence to insecure women
- Rehabilitate women criminals.

Helpline Areas of Concern

Dowry Harassment
Domestic Violence / Problems by in laws
Alcoholic spouses
Prostitution
Sexual Harassment
Problems related to love affairs
Female infanticide
Problems arising out of Bigamy
Street Fights
Missing Girls / Children
Child Harassment

Women and children in distress may contact the Women help line control room, AWPS at telephone 1091 and 1098 respectively which are toll free throughout the state. Women Help Line has a counseling centre with professional counselors attached to it. These women police attach themselves to social work organizations and women clubs to provide counseling and assistance to affected women. The Counselling role played by the AWPS is intended to be the first step in dispute resolution, compromise and settlement, to prevail upon male dominated families to shed their overt gender bias. Thus AWIS have become part time counseling centres. The cops of AWPS make appropriate suggestions as per their training. Whatever course of action the affected women choose they provide them with the required support.

Mobile Counselling Centres 2002

In order to create awareness about crimes against women and to redress the grievances of affected women. Mobile counselling centres were set up. Each centre is provided with a van with public address system. The mobile counselling teams are touring in rural areas collecting representations from the people and redressing their grievances on the spot.¹²

Women Commandos

Tamilnadu has a distinction of having the first unit of women police commandos in the country and the company of 151 women was commissioned on 2nd July 2003 at the end of the grueling three months training course for countering terrorism.¹³

All Women Battalion

An exclusive Women Police Battalion with a strength of 1078 women police of all rank which includes 2 two companies of commandos was launched in January 2004. This has added another feather in the cap of the Tamilnadu police force, as Tamilnadu became the first state to have an exclusive All Women Battalion in India. As many as 18 states have a strength of less than 1000 each, Maharashtra was in the lead in employing more women police till 1999 Since 2000 Tamilnadu becomes the first state to employ more women police in the department.

In order to enable women to approach the police station without feat and instill in them the feeling of confidence, Tamilnadu government ordered the appointment of one woman Sub-Inspector and 2 police constables in each of the existing police station in the state. A massive recruitment drive to fill up 2300 women constable and 961 women sub Inspector posts is in the process. It is an attempt to remove gender bias in the police department.

When we analyse the changes in the police department, the science efforts of the government, to establish gender equality could be noticed. The creation of AWPS, Women Help line, Mobile counseling centres, Women commandos, All Women Police Battalion and the

appointment of women police in regular police stations are the seeds for the silent revolution aimed at elevation of status of women there by facilities gender equality in the society. The concept of silently suffering Sita, who was the ideal of most Indian Women, has been changed. Women have always been marginalized in the Indian society have now found a means to voice their grievances and to protest against the atrocities done to them. Availability to help line facility and increasing awareness has led to better reporting of crimes against women. Due to gender sensitization programmes, police personnel are more responsive and encourage women victims and their relatives to report atrocities, which went unnoticed earlier. When more women are employed in police force they could defend the cause of their own sex. When a newly wedded bride has a sister, niece of friend, it could automatically reduce the risk of bridge burning, dowry harassment and domestic violence in that home.

On the other hand, the bad image of the police could be changed in the long run, because of inducting more women in the department. The Police force was the coercive arm of the British India to support the Indian subjects. After Independence the police force should move from a force concept to service concept. In the transformation the relevance of women with their innate strength of patience and sensitiveness could act as agents for bringing about and sustaining the change.

At one time policing was considered a man's job. There is no denying the fact that today policing not only a man's job. But the question is whether women police should deal only with women or they should be assigned the general function as their male counterpart. Senior women police officers do all the work which men police officers do If that the reality, women in other lower cadre too can do all work, which their male counterparts. Looking from this point of view, the women police should be given all police functions without any discrimination. That could pave the way for gender equality in the society in course of time.

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