

Original Article

# Women Police in India: Questions of Dignity, Human Rights, and Work

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Received: 07 February 2023

Revised: 10 March 2023

Accepted: 20 March 2023

Published: 31 March 2023

**Abstract** - This article is based on the proceedings of the National Conferences of Women in Police (NCWP), organised in India by the Bureau of Police Research and Training since 2002, in collaboration with the police departments of various states. It discusses the principal concerns raised by the NCWP in the last two decades. It argues that while security questions, old and new, including the safety of women, have been the province of police conferences on national security, women police in India have had to establish alternative channels, like the NCWP, to articulate their concerns as police workers, with their primary work continuing to be tied to the security of other women. Shaping the conversation about women police in policing institutions internally, these proceedings form a valuable contemporary archive in understanding the mobilisation of a collective voice by women police in a context where institutional rules prohibit and punish all unionisation. Rendered individuated and solitary, therefore, these Conferences have become the only available collective spaces where women in police have staked claims upon the state as its workers.

**Keywords** – India, Policewomen, Sexual Harassment at Workplace, Gender Mainstreaming, Health and Public Safety.

## 1. Introduction

The first Indian Inspector Generals of Police Conference took place between January 12-14, 1950, at the behest of India's first Home Minister, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel's insistence that greater interaction between the Heads of Police Forces was needed to coordinate and cooperate in addressing crime and maintaining the integrity of the newly independent country. This was before the Indian Constituent Assembly adopted the constitution on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1950. Since then, the Director Generals of Police/ Inspector Generals of Police (DGsP/IGsP) conferences have been held regularly, with the year 2015 marking their Golden Jubilee. On this eve, the Indian Intelligence Bureau released an untitled Coffee Table Book (CTB), which the Indian Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, hoped 'would be an interesting reading given that it contains the problems that Police officers faced at different points of time after independence and solution that emerged on various national security and social challenges' [8, p. 8]. The CTB is a montage of photographs and conference addresses given by country leaders; the Minutes of the Conferences continue to remain classified. From the text of the addresses, it is possible to gauge the development of policing questions/concerns through time. The addresses form a valuable archival source about how Indian policing diversified and, in so doing, articulated newer forms of insecurity and danger to both the country and its people. One reads the CTB in anticipation, then, that women—as police personnel and policing services for women—would form an important part of the CTB, particularly because police and other forms of violence against women continue to be endemic in the Indian subcontinent (Gangoli, 2016; Kalaiyarasi, 2015; Khanikar, 2016; Sukhantar, Kruks-Wisner and

Mangla, 2022; Verma, Qureshi and Kim, 2017; Visaria 2008). The reader does not meet this expectation since there are only stray references to women in the police and policing for women. The CTB's preface mentions that women's entry into the police force was actively supported in the early 1970s. There were 'some light-hearted discussions on what lady IPS officers should wear as uniform—one discussion ending with the Chairman stating that lady officers' views were paramount, on account of which the conference would need to defer decision till there were enough lady officers in service to discuss the issue' [8, p. 11]. In the preface again, it is said that harassment of women is a big city problem that requires attention. There is no reference to women in the CTB after that.

As if on cue, noticing the absence of women police in discussions on and about policing in the country, the Bureau of Police Research and Training (BPR&D), in collaboration with Delhi Police as the host organisation, inaugurated the first National Conference of Women in Police (NCWP) at Delhi in 2002. Since then, the BPR&D, which itself was set up in 1970 to supervise the modernisation of the police forces in India, has collaborated with other state and central police organisations to hold various chapters of the NCWP. This article discusses the principal concerns raised by the NCWP in the last two decades and argues that while security questions, old and new, including the safety of women, have been the province of the DGsP/IGsP conferences, women police in India have had to establish alternative channels, like the NCWP, to articulate their concerns as police workers, whose primary work continues to be tied to the security of other women. The article relies



on the conference proceedings prepared by the BPR&D and other media articles to delineate how the NCWPs have endeavoured to shape the conversation about women police in the policing institutions internally. These proceedings, the author argues, form a valuable archive in understanding the mobilisation of a collective voice by women police in a context where institutional rules prohibit and punish any attempt at unionisation. Rendered individuated and solitary, therefore, these Conferences then have become the only available collective spaces where women in police have staked claims upon the state as its workers. Individually, matters related to work, such as promotions, punishments, pensions and benefits, to name a few, have to be litigated by invoking service and administrative laws in designated tribunals. The Conferences, however, have not had a non-controversial trajectory; their mandate, as this article will delineate, has been challenged by both BPR&D and the Ministry of Home Affairs, India. Finally, this article contends that, particularly after the 7<sup>th</sup> NCWP held in 2016, an emergent collective voice of women police in India has been circumscribed through the twin strategies of restraining and appropriation. By restraining, it means invoking jurisdiction to disallow NCWPs from articulating material demands from the state and fixing accountability measures to ensure their passage. By appropriation, I mean an almost simultaneous proliferation of fora where issues and concerns of a plurality of uniformed women (railway police/ prison police/armed police) are segmented, giving the impression of specialised tackling of problems peculiar to particular forms that policing takes, but in effect has only led to increasing generalisations and policy rhetoric.

## 2. Women Police in India

Shamim Aleem's work on women police in India is the first comprehensive work attempted to present a general assessment and analysis of their status as workers (Aleem, 1987). Since police is a state subject, other studies have been about women's status in the police at state levels (Bhardwaj, 1976, 1999; Khanikar, 2016; Natarajan, 2008, 2014; Natarajan and Babu, 2020; Sahgal, 2007). Women were recruited into police services with some regularity since the latter half of the 1960s. However, it would take Aleem's work, a collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, the Department of Women and Child Development, BPR&D and 10 states, to present something like an overall picture to understand the status of women police in India. With considerable state-wide variation, Aleem's study found that the minimum and maximum number was between 4 (Meghalaya) and 580 (Delhi) [49, p. 4]. The countrywide percentage of women in the police was about 1%, but at least 5 states in the sample had more than 1% of women in the police force [49, p. 5]. At the time, the hope was that women's representation in police needed to be brought up to at least 3%.

Aleem's study shows that states such as Kerala experimented with establishing an all-women police station as early as 1973, and two more were added in 1983,

with Andhra Pradesh following suit in the early 1980s [49, p. 7]. Meanwhile, Rajasthan and Delhi set up Anti Dowry Cells in 1987, which were re-named Crime Against Women Cells in Delhi. The expansion in the recruitment of women in the police is tied to the women's movement's sustained campaigns against police violence, dowry and related violence and rape in the 1980s (Agnes, 1992, 1995, 1998; Agnihotri and Majumdar, 1995; Katzenstein, 1989; Kumar, 1993; Shah and Gandhi, 1992).

More recent countrywide research on the Indian police is the Status of Policing in India Report 2019: Police Adequacy and Working Conditions (SPIR), conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and Common Cause (CC). The SPIR echoes the service, welfare, and personnel matters that have been raised by NCWPs over the years, which the author will discuss below. In its analysis of what difference the presence of women in the police makes for both policing institutions and public services, the SPIR supports the hypothesis that there is likely to be a positive correlation between the police-community relationships and the general performance of the police [56, p. 94]. It also seems likely that the presence of women officers may reduce the use of excessive force among other officers [56, p. 94]. The SPIR shows that the percentage of women in the police increased from 3.89 in 2007 to 7.28 in the year 2016.

In 2021, the BPR&D with the MHA released the latest figures on policing institutions in India in a document called the Data on Police Organisations (as on January 01, 2021) [9]. The figures corresponding to women police officials in the country indicate that the percentage of Women Police in January 2021 stood at 10.49% of the 'Actual Strength of the total Police force in the country' and the 'Woman Population per Woman Police' was 3038.39 [9, p. 58]. The increase, however, is neither sufficient to change the violence with which policing institutions are identified nor is this negligible increase likely to make policing institutions democratic internally. With this short discussion, we move to the next sections, which discuss the proceedings of the NCWPs over the years and how they have attempted to take collective positions on women police as a minority constituency in Indian policing institutions.

## 3. First National Conference for Women in Police, 2002

The first NCWP was held in New Delhi and was organised by the BPR&D in collaboration with the Delhi Police [35]. The conference proceedings open by emphasising the principle of equality as enshrined in the Constitution of India almost to remind its readers—the policymakers—that it contains provisions to make special laws for ensuring women's equality [35, p. 1]. It enjoins the reader to acknowledge that India is a signatory to international conventions and has made commitments towards ensuring that women's capabilities are enabled and their rights upheld. The principles on which the NCWP-2002 drew suggested their demands would be structured

from within values and principles that the Indian state upholds. Their upholding of these principles sits adjacent to continuous efforts made by women, feminist and transgender movements in India aspiring to make the Indian state accountable to values enshrined in the constitution. Women police and women in the armed forces, however, have never been mobilised as political subjects by any of these democratic rights movements.

The listing of various provisions from international conventions, then, is to demand attention as women police. The list reads:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 23.... right to just and favourable conditions of work)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- The platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995; and the Outcome Document 2000
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (as girl children are future policewomen in India)
- Appreciating that the Government of India has announced the Policy for Women's Empowerment (2001) during the Women's Empowerment Year and that several State Governments are also implementing their State Policies for Women.
- Acknowledging that despite the progress reported in Census 2001, the status of women in India is low on indicators of education, health, income and decision-making positions
- Revisiting the landmark judgment by the Supreme Court of India on sexual harassment at the workplace (Vishakha Case) (discussed below).
- Celebrating the strengths of Indian womanhood, and at the same time, focusing on the increasing violence against women and children as an issue of concern to all members of society and especially to law enforcement agencies such as the police.
- Valuing the contribution being made by women in police, as evident from the recognition given and public perception, despite the police service being male-dominated [35, p. 1]

From the very beginning, as may be ascertained from the quotation above, it is evident that NCWP endeavoured to raise the policing by women question as being inextricably tied to work conditions. In other words, the NCWP enjoins the reader to acknowledge that without facilitating favourable conditions of work, policing by women may bear no fruition. However, policing practices by women might be imagined. Therefore, we see a correlation between ensuring the rights of girl children who would become the future women police officials of India, improving the status of women in India and remarking on the Indian Supreme Court's judgment that laid down the law on sexual harassment at workplace Vishakha and Ors vs State of Rajasthan and Ors, (1997) 6 (SCC 241) [58].

The proceedings further delineate three main sub-headings around which the conference was structured— (i) Forum for Women in Police; (ii) Training and Development opportunities; (iii) Minimum facilities in police and welfare issues. The first section proposed that at the state and national levels, networks ought to be created to 'learn and share experiences to mobilise them towards better service. Further, the proposal was to mandate 'equality of opportunity in recruitment and job roles'; 33% representation of women in police service; recruitment to be built into every rank and having a single cadre for men and women to ensure integration within the institution; to enable diversification with respect to forms of policing work, that is, to not having to perform gendered police work most of the time [35, p.2].

In the second, that is Training and Development opportunities, apart from emphasising basic and in-service training, the demand was to enable women to train in super-specialised areas such as 'anti-sabotage, anti-insurgency, bomb disposal investigation, weapon tactics, traffic, computers' [35, p. 2]. Quite importantly, the proceedings mention that provisions be made for continuing gender sensitisation for both men and women and access to education through distance learning be enabled for women in police, which would help them both upgrade their education and capabilities.

The minimum facilities that the proceedings mention are really quite basic, like toilets and rest areas for women, with the government being urged not to pass any construction design of policing institutions without the inclusion of these two. The other includes maternity leave enhancement to six months; not posting nursing mothers on outstation duties; day care centres and creche facilities; redesigning uniforms for comfort, climate, indoor/outdoor work, and to suit requirements of pregnancy; transport facilities for official work and family accommodation (35, p. 2).

The author has represented the aspirations of the first NCWP in detail to illustrate its emerging agenda and contend that the first conference laid the basis for thinking that the work question was not separate from that of the delivery of policing service to its public. It is important to understand the significance of this conference (and other conferences) in light of the restrictions on police officials in the Indian subcontinent. However, before that discussion, the author is inclined to review how the subsequent NCWPs articulated the women police and policing by women questions.

#### **4. National Conferences for Women in Police— 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014**

From the second NCWP, which was held in Uttarakhand in 2005, the proceedings show the robustness with which the 'mainstreaming of women in the police' is demanded from the Indian state and policymakers [36, p. 1]. The mainstreaming idea was highlighted by relying on the Platform for Action, delineated at the UN Fourth

World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). In July 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) offered the following definition of gender mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality [10].

In the context of the NCWP, gender mainstreaming meant not adding women to policing as an ancillary component or just suffixing gender to equality; it meant changing the demographic composition of Indian policing by ensuring that at least 33% of the officials were women. This representation was to work simultaneously with ensuring that recruitment adhered to 'suitably differentiated physical standards'; having women officers part of recruitments, promotions, appointments and interview boards; a gender-neutral language to address officials across ranks and terms such as 'woman constable or lady police' to be expunged [36, p. 1]. The mainstreaming of duties with respect to diversified work such as crime prevention, investigation, combat, and handling of weapons, the second NCWP suggested, ought to be done without judging familial responsibilities that women may have. Therefore, housing provisions should be provided, flexible rostering, creches, and 'posting and transfers' that match the stages of a career with stages of life [36, p. 1].

The formation of organisations like All India and State Women Police Forums, with their own websites and newsletters to enable effective networking and communication between women police across the country, was also proposed in the second NCWP [36, p. 2]. An entire section of the proceedings is devoted to the continuous demand for instituting committees to protect women from sexual harassment at work. The suggestions included setting up mechanisms for time-bound handling of complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace in accordance with Vishakha Guidelines, ensuring privacy in the form of separate toilets and resting places, posting women in pairs for out-of-station and night duties and ensuring that women officials be picked up and dropped back after night shifts [36, p. 2]. Sexual harassment in the workplace will become a continuous demand in the NCWPs, as it will discuss shortly.

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth NCWPs (2009, 2010, 2012 and 2014), held in Haryana, Odisha, Kerala and Assam, respectively, reiterated the goals and aspirations of the first two. Specifically, the third NCWP conference emphasised that each police station should have a

minimum of four women officials. Women should also be made Station House Officers of the police stations [37]. Equitable promotion opportunities, proportional rewards and incentives in recognition of service must also be created for women police, NCWP suggested [37].

The fourth NCWP quite emphatically stated that the essentials of the police uniform, apart from suitability to weather and health conditions like pregnancy, must consider that equipment such as bulletproof jackets and helmets, too, has to be suited to women's bodies and measurements [38]. For the first time, the fourth NCWP extended the conversation to collaborate with women police in armed battalions like the Central Para Military Force (CPMF) [38, p. 2]. The recommendations to women in CPMF included that family accommodations be allotted to Women's Battalions, provision of residential schools for children of women police personnel posted at difficult locations, 35% excess strength in Women's Battalions so that women can be given leave on a rotational basis.

To these aspirations, the fifth NCWP added that their precisely stated ideals and goals were still to be materialised, so there should be a Central Committee in the BPR&D to formulate a National Policy on Women in Police and to supervise those goals were implemented at both the state and central levels of police governance [39]. The fifth NCWP also suggested that Police Stations should have a Women and Child Desk to attend to their complaints.

The specific contribution of the sixth NCWP (2014) was to orient the training and capabilities of women police officials towards conflict management and communications skills. It drew on the gender budgeting in the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission of India to avail of the modernisation grants and to ensure that financial outlays specific to the needs of women are attended to [40].

Before moving on to discussing the seventh NCWP, the author would like to come back to the issue of sexual harassment of women in the workplace and the guidelines invoked in all the NCWPs thus far. Vishaka and others vs State of Rajasthan is a 1997 landmark case in which the Indian Supreme Court defined sexual harassment at the workplace and imposed key obligations on employing institutions to prohibit, prevent and redress sexual harassment at the workplace [58]. The mandatory guidelines required that an Internal Complaints Committee, headed by a woman, with more than half its members being women, be set up in every organisation with 10 or more employees to redress complaints [58]. The guidelines required that continuous awareness be created at the workplace about what constitutes sexual harassment and the mechanism put in place to address it, should someone need to file a formal complaint [58].

While women police have been required to address the safety and security issues of other women, Indian police did not implement the Vishaka guidelines internally until

2014, eighteen years after the Supreme Court laid down them down. The Indian government itself took seventeen years before it framed the guidelines into the Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 [20]. Police institutions in India adopted the guidelines only after the 2013 Act was passed. In the author's field site, that is, the Delhi Police, an initial attempt was made to implement the Vishakha guidelines in 2002 through a Standing Order [54], but the Internal Complaints Committee was virtually non-existent till 2014, which is when a second Standing Order was passed, taking into account the Act of 2013 [55]. It is in light of this delay by the Indian police institutions that we need to understand why NCWPs continuously made the demand that Vishakha guidelines be implemented.

### 5. 7<sup>th</sup> National Police Conference of Women in Police, 2016

The seventh NCWP, held in Gurugram, Haryana, was BPR&D's collaboration with the Central Reserve Police Force, a paramilitary force in India [41]. What immediately strikes me as different about the proceedings of this conference is the censorious tone with which the BPR&D strikes down recommendations made by the delegates as falling outside their scrutiny. The proceedings of the seventh NPCW begin with the BPR&D's observations about recommendations deemed not within the purview of the [41]. The document contends 'that the functional efficiencies of the women in the police are the main concern of this conference...recommendations appear to be beyond their jurisdiction relating to major policies of the government and also requires extensive consultations with stakeholders such as Directors General of CAPF, CS Division, UT Division, Police-II Division, IS Division of the MHA and DsGP of States/UTs [41 p. 1]. The proceedings' format delineates recommendations made by various groups, into which the conference attendees were divided, followed by the views of the BPR&D (Bureau). These were —

- Recommendation (Group A): The 2013 MHA directive to raise the representation of women in State Police/CAPFs to 33% must be pursued with great vigour.
- Views of the Bureau: MHA only had issued only an advisory for increasing the representation if three is a direction of MHA, at least the Bureau is not aware of. MHA would like to examine (sic).
- Recommendation (Group A): All specialised Forces to have at least 20% strength of women.
- Views of the Bureau- Consultation with Directors General of States/UTs/CAPFs is required along with Police-II Division and UT Division of the MHA being a major policy matter.
- Recommendation (Group A)- 10% of training slots in all professional courses be reserved for women.
- Views of the Bureau: Considering the poor nominations being received, implementing this recommendation may not be practical.
- Recommendation (Group B): Respect personal time and personal life. Eight hours work, job location per preference to suit life cycle, flexi-hours, and job sharing to retain trained human resources.
- Recommendation (Group B): Use technology to achieve work-life balance. Some assignments can be done from home using technology. At the same time, home can be supervised to some extent with the assistance of technology—encouragement and training in this direction.
- Recommendation (Group B): 100% accommodation for women personnel, particularly at the constabulary level, including a medical facility, education for children and transport to and from the workplace and home.
- Recommendation (Group B): Be more generous in granting leave. Compulsory adoption by all States and UTs of the Central Government provision of 6 months maternity leave and child care leave up to 2 years.
- Recommendation (Group B): Mandatory weekly off.
- Views of the Bureau: Consultation with stakeholders such as the Directors General of CAPFs, CS Division, Police II Division, IS Division, UT Division of MHA and DsGP of States/UTs are required regarding personal time and personal life issues before implementation. 24% vacancies exist in the Police throughout India in States/UTs.
- Recommendation (Group C): Portable chemical toilets for law and order/traffic duties to be funded under the Swachh Bharat initiative (Clean India Initiative) [19].
- Views of the Bureau: MHA would like to consult the concerned Ministry involved.
- Recommendation (Group C): Increase the strength of the Mahila battalion by 25% to cater for child care/maternity leave to that undue pressure of extra work does not fall on the remaining persons.
- Recommendation (Group C): Permit women posted in BOPs to live with their children (BOP stands for Border Out Posts).
- Views of the Bureau: Consultation with stakeholders such as the Directors General of CAPFs, CS Division, Police II Division, IS Division, UT Division of MHA and DsGP of States/UTs are required before implementation.
- Recommendation (Group C): Stock-taking of Recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and 2<sup>nd</sup> ARC ( Administrative Reforms Committee).
- Views of the Bureau: MHA would like to examine
- Recommendation (Group D): Strategies to handle human trafficking.
- Views of the Bureau: Strategies to handle human trafficking can only be suggestions since it is outside the purview of this conference and is a policy matter [41, pp. 1-3. I have clubbed together those recommendations where the views of the Bureau were the same].

The BPR&D required that all the recommendations delineated above needed to be expunged before the proceedings of the conference were circulated to all the Directors General of States/ UTs/ CAPFs. What, after these prohibitions, is left in the conference proceedings and as matters upon which the future NCWPs might give their opinions? What remains are recommendations such as orienting training for Alternative Dispute Resolution; greater diversification of work for women officials; increasing the minimum number of women in police stations; creating opportunities for networking, designs of uniforms and infrastructure upgradation to suit female bodies; replacing barracks with hostels along with storage spaces; better bathroom and toilets; provision of sanitary pads and proper disposal facilities; provision of drying racks for laundry; washing machines in hostels; annual medical health check-ups; facility to store breast milk in creches; simplifying the procedures for filing complaints of sexual harassment at work, along with independent inquiry of the cases; and monitoring of resources marked for gender budgeting utilisation [41, pp. 4-7].

The de-politicisation entailed in, and the implications thereof in censuring the recommendations made by the NCWP7 have to be understood in the context of two laws governing public service in India. The Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964 and the Police-Forces (Restriction of Rights) Act (RORA), 1966, bar police officials from dissenting or communicating with the press or publishing any book, letter or document associated with the discharge of a duty or being associated in any way with a trade union, labour unions or political associations. Of the two, RORA was created as a direct response to political mobilisations by police personnel in Delhi [12, p. 14; 25, p. 471-73]. There was. Consequently, some reorganisation in the service and working hours were reduced; the right to unionise, however, was not granted, and the police leaders were put under preventive detention for 17 months. India saw more police mobilisations in 1973, 1979 and 1982. In each of these low wages, pitiable working conditions and the right to unionise were raised as the most important concerns (Rao et al., 1980). While RORA has been endorsed by at least two-thirds of Indian states (Jauregui 2018, 2022a), the issues of unionisation and working conditions, however, go back to the 1920s, with the colonial state first allowing and then withdrawing all recognition from police associations in the context of generalised fear of labour militancy (Rao et al. 1980; Shil 2017).

The question of police personnel's vulnerability and the consequent demand for unionisation in India springs not from newer forms of criminalisation of society and racialised suspicion directed at the public (Fassin 2017). Rather, this issue has to be placed adjacent to the precarious relationship police officials share with the state, which disallows them any political agency as workers and requires all work/service-related matters to be raised as individual and administratively-judicialised

grievances and not as political claims. With the option of becoming a workers union or association unavailable to them, the fact that NCWPs could at all be envisaged and allowed to be held with some regularity can itself be read as a huge achievement for women police, therefore. Moreover, with objections directed at their mandate, the subsequent NCWP proceedings contain very generalised recommendations as opposed to the very real material demands made till the 7<sup>th</sup> NCWP.

Meanwhile, since 2017, there has been a proliferation of national conferences organised for different kinds of women police— prison officials and railway police officials. My contention here is that after the 7<sup>th</sup> NCWP, the agenda set through them has largely been diluted and made so generalisable that it operates entirely in the realm of 'there should be...' without any sense of accountability and accomplishments. However, I am getting ahead of myself.

## **6. National Conferences for Women in Police: 2018, 2020, 2022**

The eighth NCWP was organised at Ranchi, Jharkhand, in November 2018. From the information that has been made available by the Press Information Bureau of the Government of India, the topics that were deliberated included 'Women in CAPF'; 'Technology and skills enhancement'; 'Empowered workspace for conducive work environment'; 'Role of Women Police in Smart Cities'; 'Women in Community Oriented policing'; 'Special Training Needs for Women personnel'; 'Sexual harassment at work places-Varied perspective and management' [1]. Speaking specifically about the Jharkhand, the Chief Minister, in his inaugural address, stated that the state had instituted 33% reservation for women police and even has a separate police battalion.

The ninth NCWP was held in New Delhi in 2020. The twin objectives of the conference were to discuss preventive steps for 'Cyberstalking and bullying of women' and the 'Challenges faced by the CAPF Women in Operational Areas' [34].

The tenth NCWP was held in August 2022 at Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. The *Press Note* released by the Himachal Pradesh Police (HPP) on 22 August 2022 discusses the central issues that were discussed as part of the proceedings [21]. For the first time, the proceedings clearly lay down the purpose of the NCWP. The *Press Note* reads:

The conference provides a platform for women police officers across ranks from all over the country to share experiences, the debate about their service conditions, suggest measures to enhance work-life balance and, above all, make the society safer for women by coming up with innovative measures to reduce crime against women. The conference is also a platform through which the leadership qualities and abilities of women are enhanced [21].

In the first session of the conference, 'on shattering the glass ceiling in khaki', the discussion centred on emphasising women's fuller participation in the tasks that have otherwise been thought of as a male preserve [21, p. 1]. This diversification in work, however, must exist with simultaneous importance given to 'female police...retain(ing) their femininity and the importance of taking care of family despite being in a demanding job like police service' [21, p. 1].

The second session discussed initiatives of the Himachal Pradesh Police towards securing the safety of women in the state; the third session was a pedagogic session, 'building resilience strategies to deal with adversity' and was devoted to discussing how the delegates ought to cultivate resilience and 'concentrate on their work without worrying about the results' [21, p. 2]. The moot discussion point of the fourth technical session was to 'interact and share experiences' with police officials who, as parents, have helped their children achieve accolades in various fields' [21, p. 3].

From the ninth NCWP onwards, we see a gradual tying up of women police's work conditions to the security of non-police women. From thinking about how women might be secured from cyberbullying to productively thinking about measures to reduce crimes against women in the tenth NCWP, there is a turn away from the material work conditions highlighted by the earlier NCWPs. In fact, the Press Note released by the HPP enjoins women to serve their children, families and the nation selflessly, all in the same paragraph.

## 7. Other National Conferences on 'Uniformed Women'

In addition to the NCWPs, the BPR&D and Department of Prisons and Correctional Services, Madhya Pradesh, also organised the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on 'Uniformed Women in Prison Administration' (NCUWPA-2019) at the Central Academy for Police Training (CAPT), Bhopal on 19-20 December 2019 [45]. The difference here was that police personnel were one among many delegates assembled to discuss the 'current status of Uniformed Women in Prison Administration' [NCUWPA-2019, p. 2]. Borrowing from the work already done by the NCWPs over the years, the agenda in the NCUWPA included: (i) Creating Gender Neutral Work Place—Gender Sensitization (sic); (ii) Professional challenges for Uniformed Women Prison Officials at Work Place; (iii) Need for balancing work and family life for uniformed women prison officials—fulfilling official, social, family and personal responsibilities; (iv) Mainstreaming of uniformed women prison officials—Why and how of handling the domain so far handled by male officials. Can women officials handle male prisoners and other related issues?; (v) Happiness and well-being, stress management, health and emotional resilience; (vi) Success story [45, p. 2]. The conference proceedings are organised around what particular speakers said in different panels, with a majority of the speakers being Superintendents of prisons, also called Correctional Services in some places.

Although a detailed analysis of what each speaker in each panel would be outside this paper's scope, some significant points may be drawn from the NCUWPA proceedings. With the proceedings of the first NCUWPA not in the public domain, it is from the proceedings of the second and the address of the BPR&D Director General (DG), Mr. V. S. K. Kaumudi, that we get to know that out of 11 resolutions passed in the first, the most important resolution of that conference was regarding the change in nomenclature from the prison Department to the Department of Correctional Services, and the second most important resolution was the opening of a separate welfare wing for prisons comprising Welfare Officers, Law Officers, Counselors and Probation Officers [45, p. 5].

It remains unclear why the 'most important resolutions' in a conference about uniformed women were not about them. The emphasis on the change in nomenclature sits in stark contrast to the data he presents next, which was about the representation of women personnel in Indian prisons.

Number of women jails in India was only 22, and the actual strength of women officials, including 262 medical staff was 5248 as of 31.12.2017...the number of inmate per medical officer was 698 in Jharkhand, while there was only 01 correctional staff per 2640 inmates in Jammu and Kashmir and for 13011 inmates in Gujarat [45, p. 5].

Juxtaposing the two sets of information—'most important resolutions being a change in nomenclature' with the number of women officials posted in prisons and their distribution per inmate—gives us some indication of the incongruent political priorities to thinking about the women's question" in policing. To this, if we add that an average police official in India works 14 hours a day [56, pp. 44-45], the distribution of officials per inmate and what might be accountability measures begin to look terrifying. Furthermore, yet, perfectly harmonious contradictions populate the proceedings, albeit with no sense of irony. Consider an example. In her address, the Superintendent of Central Prison Rajkot, Gujarat, contended that

She ensured...shift duties to women prison staff that enabled them to stay at home continuously for at least for (sic) 6 hours and informed about grievance redressal committee for women staff formed by her for issues related to sexual harassment at the workplace. She advised women officers not to take advantage of being a woman for seeking undue favor/leniency...

She enumerated some challenges/issues faced by uniformed women while working in the prison department, viz., nature of prison duties, dealing with male and female inmates, the behaviour of officers/subordinates, overcrowding at metros & district headquarters, adverse effects on hygiene & health of prisoners & staff on duty, security risks, rampant tuberculosis & skin diseases, a large number of vacancies of the post of female staff, the extra burden of duty in the absence of adequate female

staff and family and social responsibilities. To overcome these challenges, prison administration was required to create a culture of gender equality, cooperation between male and female staff, respecting gender and sensitivity, re-orientation of prison administration from women officer's perspective was imperative and uniformed male officers of prison must honor the dignity of female staff of prison at all levels.

As uniformed women were unsung heroes, she advised them to believe in teamwork, should be sensible in behaviour, be good listeners, and be compassionate, firm and resolute (my emphasis, [45, pp. 13-14, my emphasis]).

How might we compare the threshold of at least 6 hours at home with what could be 18 hours of work many times a week? How do 18 hours of work sit with familial responsibilities? How does grievance redressal against sexual harassment at the workplace square up with asking women not to take advantage of being a woman or seek favours/ leniency? What might the assumption of favour entail? What could leniency mean with 14 hours work day, lack of sleep, ill health conditions and the extra burden of duty? With adverse conditions for work and health, can teamwork exist? Are gender equality, cooperation, dignity and re-orientation of prison administration questions of culture, or worse: pedagogy? Why must unsung heroes also be required to be good listeners, compassionate, firm and resolute? How do we account for the continuous surplus value generated for the state by its women workers, whose work does not fit the traditional category of workers (Jauregui 2022)?

Meanwhile, in 2022, the Railway Protection Force (RPF), which is a CAPF, also organised a National Conference on "Women in Uniform: An Agency of Change" in April 2022. RPF has the highest concentration of women in armed police in India, and the figure at present stands roughly at about 9% [48]. The Press Note about this conference, released by the Ministry of Railways, shows that kindred issues, like those raised by the NCWP over the years, pertaining to women police were discussed in the conference. These included "professional inclusion and enhancement, administrative and operational review, training and technical upgradation, welfare ...traditional male mindsets, enabling ecosystem for performance, grievances, use of technology as gender

neutraliser, Mahila (woman) Force Personnel as agents of change...' ' [48]. One reads with anticipation about how the specificity of railway policing might inflect policing by women differently from, say, civilian policing. However, again it is the generality of uninterrogated official rhetoric, as if technology can neutralise gender or that technology itself is ungendered, that stands out in the Press Note.

## 8. Conclusion

The presence of policewomen may have dual effects on public health; that is, they can play a major role in preventing violence in the community and are less likely to perpetrate violence in their official capacity are well documented (Jardine, 2018). What is also well researched is how different logics, and not necessarily diversity, inclusivity and egalitarianism, are at work that drives women's inclusion in the police forces. For instance, the All Women Police Stations in Brazil and India have been shaped by the public discourse on violence against women in these countries (Hautzinger, 2002; Natarajan, 2008). We know less about how women in the police have attempted to articulate a policing subject for whom work is intimately tied to health. I do not mean to suggest that the health of the worker in other spheres is unimportant; rather, what I wish to draw attention to is how without a granular focus on health, policing as a service may not even be conceivable. The question of egalitarian representation, then, is not just about political equality but is intimately tied to bolstering collective work performance capabilities. The issues of menstruation, hygiene, sanitation, diversity, women constituting at least 33% of the police force, work and life balance, child care, leave rules, protection from sexual harassment and work hours, to name a few, are to be understood as being connected to first and foremost to the integrity and dignity of the bodily self. By reprimanding the 7th NCWP and their demands as lying outside the jurisdiction of matters they might raise, what was sought to be subtracted was this dignity and integrity even as the rhetoric of "gender mainstreaming" has since then grown rapidly in adjacent fora.

## 9. Materials and Methods

This article relies on primary material published online by the Bureau of Police Research and Development, Delhi.

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