



## Himachal Pradesh National Law University, Shimla (India)

Journal Articles

HPNLU Journal of Social Sciences

### Volume: I (2024)

Women Guardians: Women's Leadership and Initiatives in Himachal Pradesh Police  
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ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

### Recommended Citation:

Hari Chand & Surya Dev Singh Bhandari, *Women Guardians: Women's Leadership and Initiatives in Himachal Pradesh Police*, I HPNLU JSS. 113 (2024).

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# **WOMEN GUARDIANS: Women's Leadership and Initiatives in Himachal Pradesh Police**

*Hari Chand & Surya Dev Singh Bhandari<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

*Women's Leadership and Initiatives in Himachal Pradesh Police explores the historical significance of women leaders in Himachal, showcasing their pivotal roles in social reform and progress. The paper delves into the state's police force, shedding light on the evolution of women's participation since its inception in 1973. It provides an overview of the current representation of women in the police force, emphasizing the state's commitment to gender diversity and women's safety. The paper discusses the establishment of the first all-women battalion and women police stations, highlighting their impact on crime reporting and victim support. It evaluates the success of women-led initiatives, such as the GUDIA Helpline and the Shakti Button App, in addressing crimes against women. Additionally, the paper examines the economic implications of women policing in Himachal Pradesh, emphasizing contributions to Gross State Domestic Product, workforce diversity, community relations, and gender equality. Despite progress, the paper acknowledges challenges, including the risk of creating enclaves within the police system and the need for a more integrated approach. It concludes with recommendations further to enhance women's presence in the police force, advocating for better facilities, awareness campaigns, and semantic changes to promote gender-neutral perceptions. The paper emphasizes the economic empowerment of women in policing and envisions a future where women continue to play a crucial role in law enforcement, challenging societal norms and fostering a safer, more inclusive environment.*

**Key words:** Women's Leadership, Gender Diversity, Women's Safety, Economic Empowerment, Women's Participation

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### **The objectives of the Study:**

1. To examine the establishment and functioning of Women Police Stations and Women Battalions and to assess the initiatives taken by women in the police force to address crimes against women.
2. To explore the historical role of women in leadership in Himachal Pradesh and to analyze the current representation of women in the Himachal Pradesh Police force

### **Literature Review:**

Existing research on women in policing has taken into view various aspects of their roles in law enforcement. It has also examined the historical view point and the impact of women police officers on crime prevention and community relations. Also, the review addresses the strengths, and limitations of women in policing by considering gender diversity and the limitations that persist within the system.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology adopted for this paper has been qualitative. References have been taken from non-numerical resources and concepts, opinions and deliberations on the topic surrounding the focal point of this chapter. Available International documents have been taken into consideration, and the link has been established between women in policing, women's representation in law enforcement, and the impact of women police officers on crime prevention and community relations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The term 'police' has originated from the Greek word "Politeia" or its Latin counterpart "Politeia," which broadly encompasses citizenship, state affairs, or the governance of a political entity. Consequently, "police" refers to a system of government or the authority exercised by the state. Police undertakes the role of law enforcement agency and undertakes investigation of offenses; it can be seen as the most visible aspect of the criminal justice system. Therefore, the nature and composition of the Police force have a direct and positive correlation

with an effective criminal justice system. Right from FIR to collection of evidence, the Police have both legal rights and duties it has to perform. Hitherto, the police were seen as a male-dominated force. Today, with the rise of modern outlook, the idea that certain professions are prohibited for women is falling apart. Supreme Court has allowed women to actively take part in the armed forces in the case of Lt.Col. Nitisha v. Union of India. Hence, women entering the police have created a paradigm shift.

The history of Himachal, on the face of it, stands as a witness to a plethora of instances wherein, women have refused to be curtailed within the contours of socio-political disabilities imposed on them and thereby have acted as unrecognized harbingers of social reform, collective welfare and humane progress. The selfless actions of Rani Naina Devi of Chamba, the succour given by Rani of Mandi to the Gadar movement in 1914, and the instrumental role played by Smt. Sunhari Devi during the *Pajotha* movement of 1942 within the context of the larger Quit India movement to the recent efforts put in by Smt. Kinkri Devi to the end of environmental conservation illustrates how the women of the state have personified, *inter alia*, the virtues of courage, sacrifice and selfless devotion to ensure the utmost good.

### **WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH POLICE**

According to the data provided by the Bureau of Police Research and Development, women police personnel constitute 10.3% of the police force across India. Bihar possesses the highest percentage of women police personnel which is 25.30%, followed by Himachal Pradesh which has 19.15% and then Chandigarh at 18.78<sup>2</sup>. Himachal Pradesh achieved full statehood in the year 1971. Women were inducted into the Police first in the year 1973 when three lady constables were recruited on compassionate grounds. The first batch of 28 regular lady

<sup>2</sup> Hindustan Times, New Delhi available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-has-10-3-women-in-police-force-govt-in-lok-sabha-101647339406984.html>. (Last invited on 15 March 2023)

recruits was inducted as constables in the year 1975<sup>3</sup>. It is noteworthy as the state then was only four-year-old, and hence, the Himachal Police became one of the first police forces to do so. The oath-taking ceremony for these harbingers of social change was conducted at the Police Training Center Junga near Shimla Town. The first batch was trained in horse riding, firing arms, and regular police drills. Ms Punita Bhardwaj was the first HPPS officer inducted in the batch of 1987.<sup>4</sup> Later Ms Satwant Atwal became the first woman IPS officer from the state in the year 1996. Another ceiling was broken when Ms Babita Rana became the first SHO of a Police station at Kihar District Chamba in the year 1998-1999. Women officers from Himachal Pradesh Police have served in the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and East Timor *inter alia*. In the year 200, three women were posted in every police Station of the State. The strength of women in Himachal Pradesh policies stands at 15 IPS, 8 HPS, 13 Inspectors, 28 Sub Inspectors, 45 ASI, 100 Head Constables and 2166 Constables Mrs Rani Devi, 66, was among the first three women to have joined the police as constables in 1973, inspiring many to follow suit. Mrs. Rani served the police for 40 years before retiring as deputy superintendent of police in 2013.

Further, to increase the capabilities and awareness of the police officer in general and women police officers in particular, the HPP has established special courses on "Safety of Women" at the Himachal Pradesh Police Training College. Further, the college has been decelerated a "Center of Excellence" for crime against women. Furthermore, research activity is also undertaken to ensure that the crimes against women are investigated in a better manner.<sup>5</sup>

## **WOMEN BATTALION AND WOMEN POLICE STATION**

It may be said that the police came into existence in society with the existence of

<sup>3</sup>The Himachal Pradesh Police Souvenir Book, VEERANGANA CELEBRATING WOMEN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH POLICE (2021).

<sup>4</sup>*Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Bayley, D.H., THE POLICE AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, (1969).

man<sup>6</sup>. A striking development in the Indian Police since Independence in 1947 is the rate at which State police forces have expanded. This is the result mainly of the need to cope with a rise in population and the consequent increase in workload<sup>7</sup>. Today, there are seven armed police battalions in Himachal Pradesh - one of the HPAP and six India Reserve Battalions. The 1st Armed Police Battalion was created in 1971 and located at Junga.

As such, the Himachal Pradesh Police has established a special all-woman battalion designated as 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Reserve Battalion with its headquarters at Bassi, on the foothills of Shri Naina Devi Temple<sup>8</sup>. This battalion was raised in August 2008. The sanctioned strength of the battalion is 894.

About women police stations it must be pointed out that the first women police station in the world was opened in Kerala in 1973. This concept has been successfully introduced in Himachal Pradesh. Three Mahila Police Stations were set up in Shimla, Dharamshala, and Mandi towns in September 2014. By 2015, there were Women police stations in each District except Lahual & Spiti, and Kinnaur. The concept of a Women Police Station aids by acting as a safe port for women to report incidents in an environment wherein fewer stigmas are attached to gender-biased crimes and, therefore, are female-friendly. The increase in reporting of incidents should not be only seen as a rise in the rate of crime but as an increase in awareness regarding the existence of women police stations, and the hope and trust in the working of these police stations.

The reports of crimes committed against women have reduced in the regularizations, and this has been accompanied by an increase in reports of this form of crime in urban areas where Women's Police Stations are available. This effect is many times larger in magnitude, which suggests that victims are more likely to report in WPS and that effects are not simply due to a potential shift of

<sup>6</sup> Sharma, Anupam, *Police in Ancient India*, 65(1), The Ind. J. of Political Science, 101. (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Raghavan R. K., *The Indian Police: Problems and Prospects*, 33(4) Publius Oxford Uni.Press, 123 (2003).

<sup>8</sup>*Id.*

cases across stations of different types. Therefore, it would not be wrong to state those women police stations are acting as a *sentinel on the quivive* for the women under their jurisdiction.

Opening WPS in India increased crime reportage by 22% in the country, according to a report published in June 2018. In the report titled "Gender, Crime, and Punishment: Evidence from Women Police Stations in India," researchers from the University of Essex in the UK and the University of Connecticut in the U S looked at reportage statistics on the state and city level. In light of the authorities quoted and cited, one can safely state that the *raison d'etre* of WPS establishment has substantially been achieved.<sup>9</sup>

### **Advantages of Women Police Stations and Police Battalion**

Upon interview with lady police officers, they shared their personal and practical experiences about the induction of female police officers:

1. Women are taking a greater part in political activities, protest which is a good phenomenon from the perspective of a maturing democracy. Further, lady officers pointed out that they do essentially the same work as their male counterparts. They, too, serve in tough areas.
2. Lady police officers had personal views that they inspire more confidence among the citizenry. In their own words, they have "better feedback".<sup>10</sup>As per them, there is more confidence in women IO. This fact has not been empirically tested and accepted at face value.
3. Women victims of crime feel more comfortable speaking to women officers: This view was shared by lady police officers based on their own experience<sup>11</sup>. Besides WPS, there is presence of women officers in all police stations. Officers pointed out that there is a predisposition among the female victims of crime that fellow lady officers will better cater to

<sup>9</sup>*Id.*

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Inspector Jyoti, Station House Officer WPS, Shimla (6 years' experience), ASI Kamla IO (26 years' experience). Conducted on 25 February 2023

<sup>11</sup>*Id.*



their needs.

## **WOMEN POLICE LED INITIATIVES TO TACKLE CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH**

- Establishment of Women and Child Support Units: These units were established in 1999- 2000 in every District of the state to ensure that women's complaints are heard by women police officers. It is believed that women police officers would be more sympathetic to the victims. They were successful in settling disputes but did not have the power to register or investigate cases. This dependency was tackled by the creation of the WPS.
- GUDIA Helpline: - It is a 24 x 7 helpline no. It was launched in 2018 to help women in distress. Anyone at any time can lodge their complaint.
- Shakti Button App – Launched in 2018 by HPP and the National Informatics Center. It is meant to help citizens in general and women in particular who are in distress and need help.
- Dial112–National Emergency Response System, incorporated by the HP government in 2018, was launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs after the Nirbhaya incident.
- Register No.26 – In addition to the existing 25 registers in a police station, a new register no.26. has been introduced in the year 2020 for the recording of crime against women to detect, prevent, and investigate crime against women effectively.

The aforementioned police lead initiatives for preventing women's crime in HP have provided an immense contribution to policewomen. One can argue today, the presence of women is *sin qua non* to prevent, detect, and effectively remedy such crimes.

Hence, one can state that in addition to strict adherence to laws and initiatives enacted by the Central Government, the Himachal Pradesh government took its initiative first in 2000 by establishing WACSU. Himachal Pradesh Police is

committed towards Zero Tolerance for CAW.

### **Limitation of Women Police Stations**

- One of the drawbacks is the potential formation of enclaves within the police system. Despite the initial anticipation that the establishment of new police stations would empower female officers, the practical outcome has been a reduction in the formal roles and responsibilities assigned to policewomen. This is primarily attributed to the limited capacity of these institutions to address gender-specific crimes. As a result, female officers have been impeded from acquiring comparable experience to their male counterparts, obstructing their progress within the police bureaucracy and limiting their professional advancement.
- Simultaneously, this situation has perpetuated the myth and stereotype that policewomen are only suitable for specific tasks, particularly in addressing gendered crimes. This reinforces a narrow and limiting perception of the capabilities of female officers within the police force.
- Officers at conventional police stations frequently redirect gendered criminal cases to female-only stations, despite the original intention not being to create an exclusive forum solely for women to access services. This practice compels victims to travel to distant locations to report their cases, creating an additional burden on those seeking assistance.

### **STEPS TO AUGMENT WOMEN PRESENCE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH POLICE**

Further, to facilitate the transition from a male-dominated force, there are special initiatives taken by the police force as follows:

*Creation of crèches* - To address the problems of married women police officers to carry out their duty without hassle, HPP has started opening crèches at selected police establishments depending upon the needs of the women police personnel.

- *Tackling the issue of suicide*- Further, one has to acknowledge that the job

of policewomen is very stressful due to the nature of the profession, and unfortunately, suicide has become a regular of women's police battalion. To tackle the issue of suicide within the force, many steps have been taken. The gravity of the situation can be acknowledged by the fact that once in about two months about three women constables committed suicide at different locations. Famous suicidologist Edwin S Schneidman in the noted work "Suicide as a Psychache: A Clinical Approach to Self-destructive Behavior" termed suicide as a "permanent solution to a temporary problem". The police leadership organized *Sampak Sammelans* to understand the challenges and difficulties of the women police officers. Efforts have been taken to identify police officers with such tendencies wherein close friends act as first responders. By sincere effort, the problem has been effectively tackled.

- *Women's Washrooms* - Separate women's washroom was also an issue tackled by women earlier. Sharing her experiences, ADGP (Vigilance and Jails) Satwant Atwal Trivedi (1996- batch IPS officer), the first lady IPS officer of Himachal, said working conditions for women in uniform should be improved. The issue of separate women's toilets in police stations was an important one to be discussed during the first women's police conference held in 2002.

Further, traditions like *barakhana*, Cultural programs (that include dances, drama, poetry, singing sports meet, All India Police meet, community upliftment efforts like tree plantation campaign, blood donation camp, environment cleaning operation, orchestra programs, inter *alia*, aid in the integration of police carder and officers as well as creates a positive image of police within the society. The aforementioned events are *prima facie* vital for women police as the stress of working away from the family in a regimentalized lifestyle is heavier on women. These events are stress busters and provide succour to women to reflect upon their skills. These steps aid in channeling the stress of police life; it gives them a sense of achievement and fulfillment and exhibits camaraderie.

Police have also started a cultural troupe by the name of "*Eklavya Kala Manch*" to educate people to stay away from drug abuse and other social evils. This troupe provides not just a platform for creative talent but is also an effective and informal way of reaching out to people. Women's police participation in this troupe is noteworthy.

It is important to mention that in the case of male police officers, for the convenience of their wives in police colonies, the police administration has set up a women's welfare Centre. These centers were created to cater to the recreational and vocational needs of families of police officers. Under this initiative, they are allowed to participate in activities like stitching, embroidery, and beauty care, as well as indoor and outdoor games. Further, health camps are also organized. These women's welfare centers can cater to the needs of women police officers also so that they do not feel alienated and can lead fulfilling life.

Upon interaction via interviews with women police officers, it was revealed that earlier, due to the limited presence of women, there was an additional burden on the few women present as they had to perform all functions that were required to be undertaken by women police. This pressure, as per them, was relieved by the greater induction of women. The more the women presence in police more is the comforting environment created for new inductees.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that, over time, maternity leave was augmented from three and a half months to the present six months. This paid maternity leave is another government policy that has been greatly appreciated by the police officer.

### **Economic Implications of Women Policing in Himachal Pradesh**

Himachal has taken progressive steps towards Human Development, especially in the areas of Health and education. This led to more education and a better standard of living for women in Himachal Pradesh. As a progressive step towards women's empowerment, the following economic implications can be highlighted by the women police force in the state of Himachal Pradesh:

### 1. Contribution to GSDP

If more women are employed in the police force, then this can drastically lead to higher per capita income and Gross State Domestic product in the state of Himachal Pradesh, which will further improve the standard of living.

### 2. Diversity in the Workforce:

Women joining the police force can contribute to a more diverse and representative workforce. This diversity can lead to a variety of perspectives and approaches in addressing law enforcement issues.

### 3. Enhanced Community Relations:

Women police officers may be more effective in building trust and relationships with certain segments of the community, particularly women and children. This improved community engagement can contribute to better crime prevention and resolution.

### 4. Reduced Gender-Based Violence:

Having women in the police force might enhance their readiness to address gender-based violence and crimes against women, ultimately creating a safer environment for women and advancing gender equality.

### 5. Improved Policing Strategies:

The inclusion of women in law enforcement may lead to the development of more comprehensive and effective policing strategies. Diverse perspectives can contribute to a better understanding of different types of crimes and improved methods of prevention and response.

### 6. Economic Empowerment:

The employment of women in policing can contribute to the economic empowerment of women in society. This is particularly relevant if the police force provides equal opportunities, fair

compensation, and career advancement for both genders.

#### 7. End of Patriarchal Society

The inclusion of women in law enforcement can contribute to challenging and dismantling patriarchal structures in societies. Women in police roles challenge traditional gender stereotypes that associate certain professions with specific genders. By demonstrating competence and effectiveness in law enforcement, they break down preconceived notions about the capabilities and roles of women.

#### 8. Training and Skill Development:

The integration of women into the police force may necessitate specialized training programs. Investments in training and skill development can have economic implications, potentially leading to a more skilled and professional law enforcement workforce.

#### 9. Challenges and Costs:

Implementing policies to increase the representation of women in the police force may come with certain challenges and costs. These could include recruitment and training expenses, as well as efforts to address potential resistance or gender biases within the existing law enforcement culture.

## SUGGESTIONS

*Better facilities for children in police lines* - Upon interaction with women police officers via interview, the lady officers pointed out that they, apart from their service, have the additional burden of caring for and rearing the young ones. It is primarily the mother's responsibility, among both parents, to care for the young children. Therefore, within the patriarchal setup, women officers are performing dual roles, i.e., of a mother and an officer. The crèche initiative is a step in this line

and provides succour for a better and healthier environment for fulfilling the dual responsibility. If good facilities for the family, especially for the young ones, are provided, such a policy will give lady officers a sense of security and peace of mind.

*Awareness campaign to break taboos:* Today, women are also allowed to join the army, yet as per the lady officers there is still a perception that the police are a male-only male- dominated force. There is a need to break such stereotypes via awareness campaigns, school visits, and advertisements.

*Posting in the neighboring District:* Often, they are placed as either a telephone operator or a typist in the department or given the job of escorting women prisoners or investigating minor offenses<sup>12</sup>. There is a policy prohibiting police officers from serving in the same District to which they belong though there are exceptions too. There is a strong belief, not with evidence, that such practice would lead to nepotism, regionalism, and corruption.

*Semantic changes:* The police officers pointed out that instead of being termed female police officers. They should be called just police officers. They pointed out that they should not be viewed as women who are police officers but rather as police officers who happen to be women.

*Extension of duration of Samarth Yojana:* Police officers involved with the community policing scheme pointed out that the scheme has created confidence and self-belief via training provided in unarmed combat and self-defense.

Personnel in uniform are often viewed as an occupation associated with masculinity, traditionally seen as an exclusively male domain. The police profession is associated with strength, action and danger. However,

<sup>12</sup> Randhawa G. & Narang, *Women in Police: Employment Status and Challenges*, 42(2) ASCI Journal of Mgmt., 43 (2013).

women can deal with more patience, kindness and a cool temperament in society.

Hence, there is a need to augment women police forces in existing police stations rather than exclusively making women police stations. Furthermore, there is a need to make extensive use of the forces and leadership of the Women Police Service (WPS) to address law and order issues in various aspects as they arise. These experiences would not only give them adequate confidence in the field but also increase their visibility in society, which would benefit both female officers and female victims.

## CONCLUSION

Himachal Police adopted community policing as a promising supplement to traditional policing method. The state police recognize crime control and law and order management as participative functions that require the active involvement of the community in identifying and resolving issues that give rise to crimes and disorder<sup>13</sup>. Women's participation in all aspects of social affairs is not only desirable but essential. The contemporary globalized environment has inevitably led to a state of affairs where a nation cannot prosper without the contribution of women, and therefore, the government, civil society, and we as individuals should aid and share the burden to refine, augment, and develop the untapped segment of the female citizenry as a human and social resource. The growth of women's participation, especially in the hospitality and services sector, is an area that remains poised for further enrichment. This effort should be embraced by all of us, not just to increase productivity, but more importantly, as a means to challenge and diminish the outdated belief of confining women to the home. The spirit of the contemporary epoch demands that we should abandon the sterile social belief of viewing different occupations as "gendered" in nature i.e. we should encourage

<sup>13</sup>The Himachal Pradesh Police, COFFEE TABLE BOOK, HIMACHAL PRADESH POLICE GUARDIANS OF THE HILLS. (2015).



women's participation in the field of work which were hitherto reserved for males. One must remember that no one is born a woman rather becomes a woman under societal conditions.

With the fear of depletion, one must point out that Art 14, Art 15 and Art 16 of the Constitution provide for equality between the sexes. Further, the state reserves the power of affirmative action about women's welfare. The establishment of statutory bodies like the National Commission for Women and Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government are all examples of affirmative actions. Further, India is signatory to the CEDAW, the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, thereby demonstrating the Indian state's commitment to the welfare of women.

In the light of the authorities and upon the basis of the text quoted it is safe to say that the hypothesis stands justified. Women have done a great service in the police forces. Their presence has given female victims of crime the comfort to approach the police and share their problems. Further, the effective functioning of women in the police force has highlighted the fact that gender stereotypes have no basis. The government is committed to augmenting the representation of women in the police force. Himachal Pradesh Police has taken the lead and other sister police forces will surely follow their example.

However, due to the distinct social environment of Himachal, where terrorism, religious extremism and communal tendencies are limited, there exists a favorable environment for the increased participation of women in the police force.

The positive role of women in women's battalions and women's police stations has been highlighted. Their presence has improved the ability of police to tackle issues related to crimes against women and interaction with women. Any society is roughly evenly divided between males and females, therefore male-dominated police forces cannot effectively engage in community policing without women's presence.

There is always a need for their involvement. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier,

women in Himachal have traditionally been granted more rights and freedoms compared to their North Indian counterparts. As a result, the state was able to make a smoother transition in this regard.