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Women in the Police Service

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Women have a history of deprivation. They were always a blameworthy class. Not only mythologically, but also historically and practically women are a suppressed entity. However, where there are suppressions, there crystallizes revolutions. Women are not given with their freedom freely. They had to fight for voting right, right for equal employment and profession.

Policing, as a profession or employment, is always viewed as a masculine occupation. The think-tanks of every nation used to think that fighting against crime, gathering intelligence, arresting law breakers or guarding properties against miscreants were the jobs impossible to perform by the woman. So, nobody thought of a woman working in the police service. History says that men dominated uniformed and regimented occupations always dreamt of a Florence Nightingale only to heel the wounded comrades, but no women were thought to be a co-fighter. The history of civilization has seen Queen Victoria in the West and Sultana Razia in the East, but the existence of a woman police was not even in one's imagination. Not only the common man of prejudice but also the police bosses found unnecessary to include women officers in their police departments. A retired police chief of a British county police in 1924 commented that:

"I have very carefully considered the question of the employment of police women in the County of Glamorgan from every possible standpoint affecting the administration of a large County Police Force, and I unhesitatingly declare that I am unable to subscribe to the opinion expressed that their employment would be any advantage to the County.

Sometimes the attempt of recruiting women in the police service was resisted by the male police officers who used to comment, "Put a woman in a station house under salary and she'll be trying to run the precinct inside of three months." Some news papers were also against the female police officers. They rebuked the police departments attempting to recruit woman police and warned that the woman police will be absent from duties whenever a mouse will be known on the beat.

Women were first employed on police duties during the First World War. These women working in the police were called police matrons, and they did not work out side like a regular police constable. Women organizations in Britain such as "National Council of Women of Great Britain", "London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality" put pressure to the police authorities to recruit women in the police departments. But the pressure of these women organizations was not sufficient. The Metropolitan Police of

London wanted to recruit women of submissive character. They were very much worried that women in the police would get involved in sexual scandals.

But the necessity of the Second World War forced the world to change the attitudes towards women. Serving police officers were being sent to the battle fields. The able males departed for the military, millions of persons, obviously the males, lost their lives making the world a female dominion. So, women had to fill the gaps of men in every sector, and, so in the world of policing. It is, in fact, the war which established women in the police force. Women in the police service were initially called 'Police Matrons'. Then they were differentiated as 'Police Women'. Police women were not promoted to the supervisory posts in the New York Police Department up to 1964. They were confined to work only in the women police department and were not assigned to go on patrol duties. Women could only be promoted within their own bureaus because they were told by their police superiors that they had not had the full police experience of being on general street patrol. It was, of course the same male police administration that had refused over the years to assign women to general patrol and thus had blocked police women's access to the required experience.

In 1973 the terms 'Police Men' and 'Police Women' were dropped adopting the common term 'Police Officers'. Now police officers include the officers of both sexes and no discrimination, on principle and by law, is acceptable with respect to posting, promotion and day-to-day duties.

Gender inequality shows the worst manifestation in the police service. Women were treated differently and cynically for many years in the police service. The prejudice about women police is still prevailing universally in the police departments. At an international conference on women and policing held in Amsterdam and sponsored by the European Network of Policewomen a workshop was convened on the role of femininity on police work. Women police from over twenty countries around the world shared information on the discriminatory treatment that they suffered at the hands of their male colleagues. Women receive, at best, a cool reception from male officers and, at worst, a hostile reception.

Women officers always encounter resistance not only out side but also within the police department. A study in Atlanta Police (USA), concluded flatly that male officers did not accept women as police officers. The biggest challenge that women police officers to face is the resistance displayed by male officers in their attitudes toward women in policing. Women police were harassed and resisted by the male officers because they feared that women would violate departmental (actually their own) secrets about police corruption and violence.

Women in the western countries are always ahead of time comparing to the women of the eastern countries like Bangladesh. The first police matrons appeared in the nineteenth century and in 1905, the first documented appointment of woman with police powers took place. In 1910 the Los Angeles Police Department in the USA appointed the first women with full police power. Since then, the women community has gone a long way towards equality with their male counterparts. In 1972, the USA amended Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibiting state and local government from discriminating on the basis of race, ethnicity, or gender. Police department, like other employment agencies, had to comply with this law abandoning their reservation about women police. In 1970, only 02% of all police officers in the USA were women, but by 1991, 9% members of the police were women. Now the USA has 9.5% percent of all police personnel women. But the percentage is not satisfactory to the women leaders. They are making relentless effort to make it 50%.

A woman with uniform performing the police duty, though common today, was a dismay for most of the people. The history of Bangladesh Police has long root in the British colonial India. The Pakistan Army recruited women in their Medial Corps, but they (women) were viewed still then unfit for policing.

The British found no logic to recruit women for Indian police; the Pakistani regime viewed it as a deviation from the 'Shariah law', and, even the independent Bangladesh felt little for the women. It was only in 1974 twelve women police were recruited in the Special Branch of Bangladesh police. Four years later the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) recruited women in 1978. However, no women were recruited in the supervising posts in those days. The first women in the post of the ASP were recruited in 1986 (6th BCS).Ms. Fatima Begum was the pioneer woman joining at supervisory post in the history of Bangladesh Police. This path finder woman has made her way up to the rank of DIG. In 1988 four women joined the Bangladesh Police through the 7th BCS examination.

However, the subsequent few years, though saw women police in the subordinate ranks, women were barred form joining supervisory posts. The experiment of the Ershad Regime stopped the women becoming police supervisors. His Minister of Home Affairs, Major General (Retd) Mahmudul Hasan stole the brain of the conservative English think-tanks of nineteenth century. He found women incapable of doing police job. In his presentation titled, " Law and Order Evaluation and Reform , Reconstruction and Modernization of the Police Force" on 10 December and 24 December,1989 to President Ershad, Mahmudul Hasan severely criticized the idea of recruiting women in the senior posts and suggested that only Bangladeshi Male Citizens would apply for the post of an ASP.

President Ershad approved the presentation keeping the commas and semicolons untouched depriving women from joining the police supervisory posts.

Though the Ershadian era came to an end soon after the presentation, the unholy ghost existed in the mindset of the bureaucracy for few years. From 8th to 17th BCS no female officers were recruited. In 1999 (18th BCS) another eight women joined the police service as ASP making the headway. Since then women are joining the Bangladesh Police through every general BCS exams. Today there are more than 90 women holding supervisory posts in Bangladesh Police. Ten percent quota preserved for the female candidates is also contributing much to augment the number of women in Bangladesh Police.

Today, although women consist of only one percent of the total police force of Bangladesh, the number of women is on the rise. There is a proposal to raise a battalion populated only with women officers for the Dhaka Metropolitan area. Women are doing all sorts of police work in the country. In Bangladesh police women are not meant to do auxiliary duties only. On the contrary, they are posted to the traffic duties, detective duties and pacifying and dispersing unlawful assemblies. Women in Bangladesh Police secured the position of the parade commander in the Passing-out Parade of the Bangladesh police Academy (in 2007) and deputy parade commander in the ceremonial Police Week parade (in 2008).

Women in Bangladesh Police put their marks of success not only in the country, but also in the UN Peace Keeping Missions. They are working in the civil police (UNPOL) as well as Formed Police Unit (FPU). Women are working smoothly as deputy battalion commander, liaison officer, monitor and staff officer in the United Nations Peace Keeping Missions in East Timor, Sudan, Congo, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Kosovo.

Policing is a regimented public agency rendering community services. It demands human characters with firm mental determination. As like women of the modern countries, women of Bangladesh have proved their worth as uniformed service providers. The international trend of modern policing has just made its way to Bangladesh. With a considerable number of women, the Bangladesh Police have been approaching towards gender equity.

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