

## At the prison gates

Women now have a voice in the police. They are carrying out all types of duties - regulating traffic, managing control rooms, PCR vans, conducting night rounds, checking at nakabandi points and, above all, investigating serious crimes and supervising large bandobasts. They have come to symbolise a changing India that believes in empowered girls and women. Their uniform has inspired many more to join the police department leading to a powerful community within the service.

Women managing prisons and correctional administration are unsung heroes. Their number is gradually increasing. From being wardens to jailers and deputies, women handle sensitive duties from managing prison gates, barracks, peripheral and internal security to sending inmates to courts and attending to judicial duties regarding prisoners.

Many states like Maharashtra now have 33 per cent reservation for women in prison administration: Their increased number means that they are assigned duties in male prisons too. Most of the 1,400 prisons in the country have a separate women's section with around 18,000 prisoners, according to the NCRB. There are 18 jails exclusively for women. Most prison superintendents are apprehensive of having women staff. The assimilation of women officers in the male prison administration is a challenge that is yet to be surmounted.

The nature of prison duties, hours of their shifts, are such that most of the staff stays near the prison. They form a community of their own. Many are second generation prison staff and steeped in a culture that has developed over time. It is definitely a male-dominated culture that broadly believes that prisons are places for the punishment for criminals and that the latter pose a risk to society. The security of prisons and counting of prisoners is their main occupation.

The presence of women in prison administration requires that officers and staff of prisons are in sync with the culture of gender equality, respect and cooperation. Women come with their own strengths - teamwork, participative management, communication skills etc. They also herald a shift in favour of a correctional administration instead of the traditional punitive mindset. The re-orientation of prison administration has thus become imperative.

The Supreme Court has flagged this issue and that of training prison staff. It has tasked the Bureau of Police Research and Development to revise the existing syllabi for the training of prison officers/staff - a highly ignored area. After basic training during induction, there is hardly any in-service training. Training at regular intervals, linking it with promotions and updating technical knowledge deserve the attention of all state governments, since police and prisons are state subjects.

Last year, the Bureau established a micro-mission to deal with issues of prisons and correctional administration. Besides updating syllabi of basic training for prison administrators, there is a strong need for their reorientation towards correctional administration. Prison officers and staff need to veer towards an attitude of reformation and rehabilitation. The focus should shift from punitive to correctional.

Prisons in most metros and district headquarters are over crowded. Mumbai's Arthur road Central prison is a classic example. The adverse effects on the hygiene and health of prisoners and the staff on duty can be imagined. Tuberculosis and skin diseases are rampant. The security risks are enormous. In this situation, relieving even one staff member for in-service training appears to be a luxury. Thus, besides regular training, filling around 34 per cent vacancies in prisons needs immediate attention. Women officers and around 4,400 staff working in these conditions have the

extra burden of traditional family responsibilities. Their problems have not been studied or attended to.

What kind of challenges are uniformed women facing in prisons? What is their work satisfaction? What kind of duties can be allotted to them in the male prisons? Is their uniform gender-friendly? Are their working hours reasonable and conducive to a healthy family life? Discussions about possible solutions and engaging with them on continuous basis can help women in prison administration reach their potential. They can be equipped with professional expertise to ensure that incidents like the custodial death of Manjula Shete in Mumbai's Byculla prison do not occur. While prison administration as a whole needs attention, the issues of uniformed women in prison administration require a thorough review and follow-up action.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com