

Indian Police Introspective: 56th Independence Year

Maintaining law and order in a turbulent country like India with all shades of crimes, ranging from human bombs to 6-year juvenile committing murder, requires extra ordinary grit, professional competence and sensitivity at the same time. Policing a complex society like ours' could be the tallest order for even the most competent government anywhere in the world. Since the Police reflect the society it serves more honestly than any other public agency, the police forces in different states, cities and regions mostly behave like the people they serve. The Goa Police still behaves as much like the Indo-Portuguese cocktail as the Pondicherry Police dealing with the heady mix of the French, Tamil and Aurbindo cultures. It is impossible to find the same behaviour pattern in the police organisations serving different parts of the country confronting the peculiar local problems, although, Indian Police is considered to be among the best organized forces, a monolithic mosaic.

Perhaps, nothing could be more daunting, exciting and enriching in terms of experience in human affairs than being in police service. Two and half decades back, intense inland-water fights took place between the poor fishermen on 'Katamarans' and the rich on power boats, quite similar to the conflicts between the upper and the lower castes in the fractured villages. The forms have changed but such conflicts continue all over the country. The conventional crimes have acquired far more lethal modus operandi while the economic crimes have multiplied countless folds in terms of the techniques, dimensions and the damage they create. Forms and methods of terrorism have also undergone dramatic changes being part of the developments internationally. The past 2 decades have witnessed major upsurge in the organized crimes involving drugs, trafficking of women and children, and insurgency, which have created extra ordinary demands on the police. However, the policemen have been appropriately judged for their behaviour with the common man in ordinary situations and they have not covered themselves with glory.

My own experience of investigating the diverse crimes, such as, terrorist cases ranging from the transistor bombs to Rajiv Gandhi, Lalit Mekan and Arjun Das assassinations, handling multiple crimes committed by Jinda, Penta and the types, provided fascinating insight into the terrorist-martyr psyche. Interrogating Harshad Mehta, V Krishnamurthy, even Romesh Sharma was at times a learning experience, quite equal in value to the examination of the top most leaders of the country in the Hawala Case. However, investigating the most sensational crimes did not cause an impression similar to the one, which occurred in 1984 riots wherein despite being applauded subsequently for controlling the situation one felt a major sense of loss.

It was police again that gave an opportunity to wipe tears and to salvage thousands of neglected children through 'Prayas'. Working with the disadvantaged and the vulnerable children was as rewarding as handling the

juvenile delinquents in institutional and non-institutional situations within the framework of Juvenile Justice system. There appeared to be no conflict between the professional policing to contain the multiple situations of law and order or investigating the most serious crimes through the legal process and the community sanction acquired through voluntary action. Community policing is no more just an outlandish expression in the police lexicon reserved for the visionaries and the soft cops. Whether it be Mizoram or the Punjab which posed the most serious insurgent threats to our national integrity, the lasting solutions came primarily through the democratic process, and only partly through the police and political leadership who claimed to have restored normalcy.

It is now the time to pause and think, to introspect and judge whether we have given to ourselves a police force or a service befitting 56 years-Independent India. There must be million told and untold stories of police atrocities and injustices, the agency being just the prime mover of a crumbling criminal justice system and not an instrument for justice. Governed by the 1861 vintage Police Act with concomitant basic criminal laws that completely distrust the force, and mostly controlled with motives that deprive the police of the 'rule of law insularity', it is extremely difficult to create a community-oriented service. The need for the fundamental changes in police were never felt so intensely as today, when the country happens to be in the midst of most dynamic socio-economic and political churning. There is no dearth of the guiding principles, which are well enshrined in India's Constitution and the myriad pro-active social legislations crying for enforcement.

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