

A MORE HUMANE POLICE FORCE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

While improvements in pay scale and promotions are necessary aspects of police reforms, little has been spoken about reforms needed at the psychological level. Why do citizens fear going to a police station or dealing with the lower ranks of the police force?

The answer lies in numbers. Between April 1 and November 30, 2015, 25,357 cases were registered under police category which included 111 deaths in police custody, 330 cases of custodial torture and 24,916 in others. These numbers were shared by the former Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijju, in the Lok Sabha in response to a question. In comparison, according to the Australian Institute of Criminology, from 1989-90 to 2010-11, the deaths in police custody and custody-related operations were 700. In the U.K., England and Wales, the total deaths in police custody or following contact with the police (1990 to 2015) was 1,542. In the U.S., according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the number of state prisoners' deaths between 2001 and 2007 was 21,936 although one could argue that an unaccounted number of political prisoners from the U.S. disappear into privately maintained black holes called the supermax prisons both on and off U.S. soil. However, not considering the different time periods, an off-hand comparison would show that custody-related deaths in India are more than the sum total of the countries mentioned.

One question on the minds of the common people is: how can a human being inflict so much pain on another without the slightest remorse? Two famous experiments provide an explanation. In the Stanford Prison Experiment, people who had applied to be a part of the experiment were randomly divided into two groups: prison guards and prisoners. Under duress, the participants who played the role of prison guards started exploiting and torturing the participants playing the role of prisoners. Milgrim's experiment on obedience to authority showed that people obey if they are coerced. A staggering 65% of the participants applied the maximum level of pain on the "victim" while the remaining 35% remained in a range. Only a minuscule number refused to inflict any pain even under coercion. The results of Milgrim's experiment were shown to be true even in variations of the experiment.

In the Indian police force, the lower ranks of police personnel are often verbally abused by their superiors. Many are not considered as individuals, are not shown compassion by the senior ranks, and work in inhuman conditions. While the alleged excesses of the police cannot be justified, it is important to look at how the treatment meted to police constables has affected the interaction of the police with the public. Many policemen deal with citizens in the manner that they do only because their work environments are not harmonious. Their relationship with their superior officers is stressful and sycophantic. There is no concept of welfare and this manifests in their improper behaviour with the citizenry.

Several committees have made several recommendations on the issue of reforms for a healthy police system. The Supreme Court of India was forced to intervene as neither the Central government nor the State governments acted upon those recommendations. It is clear that the problem is with the political apparatus considering the history of the Police Act. The Police Act of 1861 was legislated by the British right after the revolt of 1857 to bring in efficient administration of police in the country and to prevent any future revolts. This meant that the police were to always comply with those in power. Considering the results of the privatisation of the prison system and militarisation of the police system in the U.S., it would be disastrous to even consider this as a solution in India. Thus, political will is seen as an essential component in

bringing about any major reform in the Indian police force.

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

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