

PERSPECTIVES ON POLICE TRAINING by S. Krishnamurthy. Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, 2002

Book Review by Mrs. Maja Daruwala and Dr. Doel Mukerjee

DESPITE their only too well-known misdeeds and the enormous power and influence that police wield over the lives of people like us, little serious attention is paid to police reform. Not enough is written about the police in India much less about practical means to reform them. What there is, is confined to the readings of those who are already knowledgeable on the subject. However, over the last few years a trickle of literature has emerged that aspires to seed the now long dead debate on what should be done about an essentially failed arm of governance.

Krishnamurthy's book, *Perspectives on Police Training*, which concentrates more on the reform of police training methods than of the whole institution, deals both with the patterns of crime that confront the police of the 21st century and strategies that can be adopted for improved training for different levels of personnel so as to make for a more efficient police. The author makes a plea for a revised philosophy to underpin training efforts and improved training methods and skills to create a people-friendly force capable of dealing with the challenges of the times.

The police in India, as in all countries in the subcontinent, have traditionally been part of a colonial system of criminal justice that reined in a native population. Training was geared to maximize the use of force and suit the needs of colonists. As a result training was militaristic, emphasized physical fitness, drill, blind obedience, unquestioning discipline and curbed innovation or initiative in the constabulary. In the intervening years since Independence the population has increased threefold and police duties have multiplied, yet little has changed in the classroom or parade ground. Police training also remains undisturbed by the intervention of a constitution that foregrounds democracy, pluralism, rule of law, concepts of citizenship, human rights and civil liberties.

The Gore Committee (1971) argued that the police could be trained to enforce rule of law in a democracy and emphasized the need for training that would enable the personnel to change their *attitude* toward the citizenry. In order for police to acquire 'a high degree of professional competence, they need to develop a clear understanding of the social purpose of their activity and sensitivity to the trends and forces at work in the environment in which they act. They require to develop attitudes in consonance with the concept of social justice contained in the Constitution and develop programmes with particular reference to the weaker sections of the community, including the poor, the minorities and the SC/ST's.'

As a result of these recommendations initiatives were taken at some levels of training in police institutions. These now include courses in behavioural sciences, emphasis on police management and leadership, improving the mental horizons of police officers through the study of wide ranging subjects, deputation to non-police training institutes, formation of a Central Directorate of Police Training and similar ones at the state police headquarters under an Inspector General of Police, and so on.

However well meaning the recommendations of various commissions, few are implemented. Krishnamurthy rightly points out that to date efforts at training remain ad hoc and unsystematic, limited to and concentrated on senior officers when it is the rank and file who should be the major focus of attention. Even where money for training is not the issue because so little is required, many good experiments such as those initiated by the Bureau of Police Research and Development suffer for want of attention, encouragement and willingness to replicate. Police

sub-culture continues to deteriorate. The public has its own negative image of the police but it is increasingly being acknowledged that the internal sub-culture is creating a force which is barely amenable to obedience even to its superiors: the constabulary with few role models to draw on from within the force prefer to depend on direct obedience to and connections with political patrons rather than to submit themselves to the discipline of the force or answerability to immediate superiors.

Krishnamurthy additionally suggests that modern policing requires an infusion of non-police personnel for research and development, the application of appropriate technological improvements at desirable levels, a bottom to top approach which includes the induction of quality manpower at the grassroots, and an integrated crisis management service with global dimensions of which the police will be an integral part. Finally, the author also suggests that it is practical to privatize some of the duties that police carry out today.

All this is commonsense. The National Police Commission (1979-1981), a group of well-reputed experts in policing and governance sitting in the aftermath of the police's dark record during the Emergency, examined police functioning and made the most comprehensive recommendations since the Fraser Commission (1902) for overhauling police functioning so that the force becomes a handmaiden of democracy rather than the impediment it presently is. The NPC recommendations were carefully and deliberately mothballed until now, nearly two decades later, they are hardly known or discussed. But they remain valid and practical. Though police is a state subject, the central government has enough clout to encourage serious dialogue and catalyze reform in the states. But it has not done so. The states have shown uniform reluctance to curb or punish erring police and a conspiracy of silence allows malfunction to continue uncorrected.

The National Human Rights Commission receives over 70,000 human rights complaints a year – a majority against the police. Going to the heart of the problem the NHRC has impleaded itself in a public interest litigation that seeks to have the NPC's recommendations acted upon. But in the meantime it is reduced to wringing its hands in frustration at the refusal of the executive to act.

All this leaves open the question: why is so little being done to improve a force of some 13.2 lakh personnel, which costs the exchequer roughly Rs 12511.73 crore per annum and yet has managed to lose the confidence of the public entirely? The answer lies in a lack of political will since the force is politically convenient to every ruling party. Possibly this is why we see increasing reliance on undemocratic laws like Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance and the threat of force in lieu of good governance.

Though the Gujarat killings, arson and looting provide evidence beyond reasonable doubt of the police culpability, inefficiency, bias, failure of command, function and will, it is unlikely that public suffering and outrage will translate into meaningful efforts to reform the force either in Gujarat or elsewhere.

No doubt as is usual, diligent NGOs will collect piles of evidence, a judicial committee will uncover evidence of atrocities and criminal acts by the police, and the courts at some long date will pass strictures against the usual suspects. But, as has happened with all the other inquiries, named policemen safe in the sponsorship of their political patrons will go on being promoted and live happily ever after even as their victims eke out broken lives as best they can.

Even as the sense of injustice turns to cold anger and rage, books like the one under review that ask little enough will probably be ignored. Given the insular nature of our political classes it is

unlikely that, unless strongly pushed, Krishnamurthy's book will find an audience outside those who already believe that the police in its present form is well past redemption. Any effort at seeking new information is regarded as prying into a domain that is out of bounds. There is an urgent need to collate literature on the various commissions and committees that have been set up on police issues and publish them in an easy to read style in different regional languages. Krishnamurthy's attempt to highlight fresh perspectives on police training so that the law enforcement agency can be made more people friendly are praiseworthy.