

Policing since Independence

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There has been considerable improvement in manpower and other resources of the police since Independence. The total strength of the police in India in 1947 was 3.81 lakhs. By 1995, the strength of the state police forces had increased to 13.41 lakhs. In addition, the central para-military forces, mostly raised since Independence, had a strength of 5.61 lakhs on 1.1.1995. In 1947, the police forces were ill equipped without adequate transport and communication facilities. On January 1, 1995 about 73,000 different types of vehicles were available with the state police forces and a network of about 90,000 police wireless stations existed in the country. At the time of Independence, there was not a single full-fledged forensic science laboratory, while now there are 18 State and four Central Forensic Science Laboratories to provide scientific aids to investigation. At that time, the educational standards of the police were low. Most of constabulary consisted of either illiterate or semi-literate personnel. Now matriculation is the minimum qualification for recruitment as constable and graduation for entry as sub-inspector. The opportunities for exposure to new ideas and techniques through in-service training courses have also increased.

The expansion of the police forces and improvement in their resources have led to considerable increase in expenditure on the police. In 1951-52, the revenue incurred by the central as well as state governments on the police was only Rs. 58.73 crore. In 1995-96, on the other hand, the expenditure incurred on the state police forces was as high as Rs.7198 crore.

What have been the returns to the public on the resources invested in policing? Undoubtedly, the police now are larger in size, better equipped, better educated and presumably better trained than what they were earlier, but has there been an improvement in their professional standards? The public do not think so.

Crime, which causes tremendous human suffering and is a cause for major public concern, has continued to rise. The total cognizable crime in 1948 was 6,25,909. By 1994, the latest year for which crime statistics are available, cognizable crime under IPC had increased to 16,35,251 i.e. by 161.2 percent. What is more disturbing, from public point of view is the fact that violent crime has increased at a faster rate than total crime. While only 49,578 violent crimes were reported in 1953, this figure had gone up to 2,35,228 in 1994 i.e. an increase of 374.4 percent. The increasing trend in crime had been accompanied by a continuous fall in conviction rate. While in 1961, 64.8 per cent of the IPC cases ended in conviction, by 1971, the conviction rate had declined to 62.0 per cent, by 1981 to 52.5 per cent, by 1991 to 47.8 per cent and 1994 to 42.9 per cent.

The fall in conviction rate indicates a decline in the quality of criminal investigations, though successful convictions do depend upon other factors too. The fact is that investigation work is not receiving adequate attention, with law and order and security duties figuring high in the priority list. It is this factor which has largely shaped the growth and composition of the police as well as the pattern of policing. There has been a

rapid expansion of the armed police in the country. A number of new para-military forces have been established since Independence, particularly by the Centre and these forces have seen enormous expansion during the last few years. A huge chunk of central expenditure on police is being spent on the maintenance of these forces.

The record, however has not been entirely dismal. The police have some good achievements to their credit, particularly in dealing with emergency situations. They have handled a variety of law and order situations with reasonable success and their record in dealing with problems of insurgency and terrorism has not been bad. What is most creditworthy is the fact that the policemen have performed their arduous jobs under very tough conditions, making supreme sacrifices at the altar of duty. A large number of policemen have lost their lives in line of duty. The existence of a body of about 19 lakhs police personnel, fairly well disciplined, can be a great boon to society, provided their vulnerability to undesirable illegitimate pressures is reduced, their professional capability enhanced and they are made accountable for what they do and the manner in which they do it.