

THE INDIAN POLICE SYSTEM AND INTERNAL CONFLICTS

by

F.E.C. Gregory

India presents the student of police systems with many interesting features for analysis. The country is vast, the population is large and diverse in race, religion and language. Moreover, as a developing country, India has the ever-present problem of inadequate resources to cope with all the political, economic and racial problems. Therefore, India presents a picture of a society where the potential for internal conflict is ever-present. D.H. Bayley has suggested, ". . . that the tenuousness of social peace in India is one of the foremost factors conditioning police activity."¹ He further argues that, "Were it not for the prevalence of violence, there would be no reason to maintain from two-fifths to one-half of all police as quasi soldiers not engaged in ordinary police work but saved for law and order operations."²

This article will examine aspects of the post-independence development of the Indian police system. The discussion of the police system will be related to general political, economic and social developments. It will also be related to recent internal conflicts that have brought the Indian police into the news in the West with headlines such as: "Desai disbands police to quell mutiny" (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 June 1979); "Mrs. Gandhi accuses police in Assam" (*The Times*, 2 July 1980) and "Bihar police strike threat" (*The Times*, 4 Dec. 1980). The particular aspects of policing in India that will be considered are the legacy of the imperial police service, the impact of modernization in India, and the growth of centrally organized police forces.

What do the Indian police have to contend with in terms of internal troubles? David Bayley identifies three broad categories of what he calls "public violence."³ These are the violence of remonstrance — which aims to bring a problem to the attention of government; the violence of confrontation — conflict between groups in the community, and the violence of frustration — eg. student riots or a riot over lack of supplies in a government fair price shop.

Recent examples of these forms of "public violence" can readily be cited. The major riots and disturbances in the north-eastern states of Assam and Tripura are examples of the violence of remonstrance. The native populations of both states are protesting about the high levels of entry of Nepalese and Bengali immigrants and refugees from Bangladesh. In Tripura in June 1980 six days of fighting left at least 300 dead and 50,000 homeless, according to official figures.⁴ The riots between Hindus and Muslims in the northern city of Moradabad in August 1980 provide an example of the violence of confrontation between different groups in the community. In these riots mobs attacked police stations and there were reports of armed gangs capturing policemen.⁵ An unusual example of the violence of frustration is the demonstrations in the state of Bihar in support of the local police, who it was admitted had unlawfully wounded

prisoners. In the rather backward state of Bihar some sections of the community apparently welcomed the exercise of violence against suspected criminals as an appropriate way of dealing with a high crime rate.⁶

What sort of police system did India inherit from the period of British rule? The basis for police operations and organization is still the British 1861 Police Act for India and therefore, as Dr. Acharya notes, "Contemporary Police philosophy in India is an ironic combination of British liberal tradition and British colonial practice."⁷ The police were subordinate to the rule of law but not citizens in uniform like the British constable. The police in India were modelled on the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) rather than Sir Robert Peel's English "New Police". The RIC was a force designed to maintain the rule of an alien polity and thus an appropriate model for other colonial police forces. Therefore the Indian police became associated, especially during the twentieth century independence struggles, with the machinery of British "oppression". Under the British Indian police system the police were a decentralized body of state and city forces. They were, in broad terms, divided into the unarmed or civil police who were responsible for all ordinary police duties, and the armed police who could be used in the suppression of public order problems. During World War II the British authorities established a centrally controlled and organized police public order force, the Crown Representatives' Police (CRP) Force. This force was to assist the police and army to maintain internal order because of the strains of war and the internal unrest caused by the freedom movement.

When independence was achieved the new Indian government made no fundamental change to the imperial policing system. Under the constitution and by the inherited body of laws the police function remained decentralized and the responsibility of the state governments but the Union government provided certain important police services and retained the ability to raise national reserve police forces. The most notable service is the All-Union cadre of senior police officers, the Indian Police Service. This cadre, which is centrally recruited and trained, provides all states with a high proportion of officers in the managerial ranks of Assistant Superintendent to Director-General.

Before analysing the problems of policing in contemporary India it is necessary to outline the scale of the country and population size problem in relation to the police. India has a population of about 600 million and a total police strength in the States of almost 762,000.⁸ This gives a police-to-population ratio of approximately 1:1000 (by comparison the approximate ratios for the UK are 1:470 and the USA 1:230). Of the total police strength about 580,000 are civil or unarmed police and about 178,000 are armed police. The armed police total has to be augmented by the totals for the principal police reserve forces maintained by the Union Government, the CRP (66,548 in 1977) and the Border Security Force (BSF — raised in 1965) (74,100 in 1977). Therefore, depending on exactly which paramilitary police forces are counted with the state armed police, the International Institute for Strategic Studies' figure of 300,000 for the total of paramilitary forces in India would seem approximately correct.

These figures have to be put into perspective by relating them to the size and condition of the country. The basic police administrative unit is the station commanded by a Sub-Inspector; in rural areas the station may cover 160 square km.

and contain 75,000 people. The Sub-Inspector is one of the non-gazetted ranks (NCO equivalent) and he may not have a very high level of education. However, he is the key officer for the public as he and his station staff will be in most immediate contact with the public. Dr. K.V. Rao has described the Sub-Inspector as the “. . . key-stone of the police arch . . .”⁹

Efficient policing, defined here as the ability to prevent crime, apprehend criminals and maintain order with available resources, will in practice vary considerably from area to area. In some regions natural factors such as climate and geography can greatly hinder police work, geographic factors being a special hindrance where the Dacoits or bandits operate. In other areas, like the states of Bihar and Orissa which are relatively underdeveloped and have caste problems, there is likely to be more conflict and hence a more repressive form of policing. By contrast in states which have been under left-wing party control like Kerala and West Bengal, the state governments have tended to use their police more like semi-social workers. In states where there is a high level of persistent public order problems ordinary police work may have to give way to a concentration on public order maintenance. During the period of Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency Rule thirteen states each had over 20 companies of BSF and CRP deployed to their territories.¹⁰

In order to understand why there may be mutinies or unrest in Indian police units it is necessary to consider not only the duties the police have to perform but also the fact that the police themselves are affected by India's political, economic and social development. In essence many of the frustrations in the Indian police can be related to the national problem of scarce resources. Ideally, India needs an overall increase in police manpower and higher pay and a generally better educated and trained police force. In 1979 the *average* wage for a constable in state forces was £20-£30 per month and it was reported that in one state it cost more to feed a police dog per month than a policeman received in pay.¹¹ In fact the Union and state governments have increased expenditure on the police since independence; in 1950-51 India spent Rs (Rupees) 30m on the police while in 1974 the figure was Rs 1,564m.¹² However much of the expenditure for the Union has gone on raising more reserve police units or special duty police units (like CISF — Central Industrial Security Force). In the states additional expenditure has sometimes been spent on increasing the size of the armed police as a means of easing unemployment.

The process of modernization in India has had a number of effects upon policing in India. In general the development of better communications means that more areas are open to continuous policing which in turn means a need for more police. Increased urbanization means that more police are needed in the cities. For example, a few years ago New Delhi needed only two District Superintendents; now it has 2 senior Superintendents and four District Superintendents. The development process has also eroded a key feature of the traditional relationship between the district civil administrative officer and the district police superintendent. Under the system of British imperial rule the two senior officials in a district were the District Magistrate or Collector and the District Superintendent of Police. The magistrate, as the chief administrative officer of the district, exercised a general form of control over the police in his district.¹³ After

independence this system continued but gradually the degree of control exercised by the Magistrate over the district police began to decline. In part this was because the District Superintendent has become much more of a professional policeman and therefore more capable of handling *all* police matters. In part the decline in the Magistrates' exercise of the role of police supervisor is due to the Magistrate as an administrative official, becoming more a district development officer, concerned with economic and social problems. Therefore the Magistrates may seek to avoid too close an identification with law and order issues, except where major crises make this impossible.

If the civil administrators as well as local and national politicians seek to avoid close identification with the necessary exercise of repressive police powers in times of serious internal troubles, then this leaves the police officer in an exposed position when trying to maintain law and order.¹⁴ If senior police officers feel that firm action will only lead to a commission of inquiry they may prefer to avoid taking action until a very serious situation develops.¹⁵

A particular aspect of the modernization process in India that has an important effect on public order maintenance by the police is the rise in educational standards. Because of increased educational opportunities and the unemployment problem the recent recruits to *all* grades of police entry tend to have more than the minimum educational qualifications. This has meant that although the states still maintain functionally and locationally separate armed and civil police branches it is not always easy to maintain the numbers in the armed police who have a more restricted police role. In the past recruits to the armed police needed even less educational qualifications than the limited requirements for civil police constables. The better educated recruits who have to join the armed police may become frustrated with its restricted role and seek transfers to the civil police.

A number of writers have questioned why a country like India, which professes to be a democracy, needs so many central reserve police forces.¹⁶ One difficulty with analysing this point is that Mrs. Gandhi has begun to question the form democracy should take in India, and here one may note the controversy that surrounded her period of Emergency Rule.¹⁷ A charismatic leader-figure like Mrs. Gandhi, may feel that India's salvation lies in unquestioned support by the population for the central power.¹⁸ Putting such a view of politics into practice could require a strong police force to contain expressions of opposition. The development of Indian para-military police forces has been exhaustively analysed by K.P. Misra and his conclusions seem to be well founded on the evidence available. Misra, whilst aware of the possibility that India could succumb to authoritarian rule, argues that, for the moment ". . . the para-military forces have acted as a supporting cast in a drama (India's internal conflicts) in which the main actors are the police forces of the several states or the army. The para-military forces . . . insulate the military from direct intervention in domestic disorder and permit it to concentrate upon external defence; they also stiffen the backbone of local police forces . . ."¹⁹ Misra notes that the use of para-military police forces can be abused but that in India such abuses can be corrected.

The point about avoiding too much military involvement in internal affairs is

very important in the Indian context. The formation of the heavily-equipped Border Security Force stemmed, in part, from central government policy to give a high level of public order control capacity to the police. Despite its title the BSF has few border patrol duties. Most of the BSF is stationed around New Delhi and the rest of the BSF is divided between four regional commands, North, South, East and West India, each under the command of senior Inspectors-General of Police. It is hoped, in India, that this powerful police public order capacity will avoid the sort of serious general breakdowns of public order that have often been the excuse for military intervention and eventually military rule in Third World states. The example of Pakistan is a constant reminder to India of what can happen in those circumstances.

If the police reserve units are maintained for such laudable aims why were there reports of mutinies in CRP companies in 1979? Part of the answer can be found in frustrations over pay and conditions similar to the frustrations in state forces. The other part of the answer derives from the length of some of the deployments of CRP companies. Ideally reserve police units should only be used for what they are trained, that is, to be brought out of barracks as a fresh, disciplined, well-equipped supplement to the local police for short periods of public order maintenance. If, as has happened in India, reserve companies are kept deployed for too long out of barracks they become involved in the more long-term and routine forms of police work and this is a task for which they were not designed.

As in all societies today there are no easy answers to the police response to internal conflicts. Governments will try to govern and, hopefully, people can be assured of certain minimum rights in times of internal crisis.²⁰ The familiar police request for more men and more pay is as appropriate to India as any other country. In this context Indian governments have a "chicken and egg" dilemma. Do they put resources into a larger and better paid police force which may be more able to control internal conflict, the "symptoms" approach? Or do they put resources into economic and social development, the "causes" approach? In practice, of course, the governments will have to try and do both because economic and social miracles will not happen quickly enough to satisfy the needs of all the population; internal conflicts will continue. One useful measure that has been contemplated but not enacted is the introduction of a new Police Act for India. Such a measure could preserve the best of the imperial system, the policeman as the servant of the law, whilst more explicitly relating the police to modern Indian society by stressing the concept of the police as a service — rather than the imperial concept of the police as a government force. As one Indian police writer has well noted, "The reputation of our police for fairness and impartiality can only be established when the people of this country (India) confidently expect the police to enforce the law without distinction of social or religious class or political party."²¹ General public confidence in the police in India will not be easily attained or maintained but it will be worth striving for in a country with so many intractable problems.

Footnotes

1. D.H. Bayley, *The Police and Political Development in India* (Princeton, 1969), p. 248.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
4. *The Times*, 12 June 1980. Report citing information from the *Indian Express* and the *Hindustan Times*.
5. *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1980. Report from correspondent in Delhi.
6. The actual incident involved the blinding of 31 suspected criminals by a small number of policemen — a fact admitted by Mr. Mishra, the Chief Minister of Bihar. See reports of the incident in *The Times*, 28 Nov. 1980 and 1-5 Dec. 1980.
7. Dr. M.R. Acharya, "Recruitment and Promotion Policies of the Police Personnel in India", *Journal of the Society for Study of State Governments*, vol. 5, nos 3, 4 (1972), p. 221.
8. The figures for police strength have been approximated from the figures given in: R.D. Ingleton, *Police of the World* (London, 1979), pp. 93-95; P.G. Shane, *Police and People* (London, 1980), p. 88; and K.P. Misra, "Paramilitary Forces in India", *Armed Forces and Society*, vol. 6 (1980), p. 377.
9. Dr. K.V. Rao, "Recruitment, Training and Other Related Matters on the Indian Police", *Journal of the Society for Study of State Governments*, vol. 5, nos 3, 4 (1972), p. 191.
10. These figures are taken from K.P. Misra, p. 382 — the average size of a CRP and BSF company is approximate 550 men.
11. Details of police pay come from M. Ram, "India — Losing the Will to Survive?", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 104, no. 23, 8 June 1979, p. 34 and *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 June 1979 — report from New Delhi.
12. S.C. Sarkar, "Law and Order: Indira Treads a Costly Beat", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 86, no. 41, 18 Oct. 1974, p. 30.
13. This relationship and post-independence developments are discussed in: Shri G.C. Singhvi, IPS, Deputy Inspector-General, Ajmeer Range, "District Magistrate and District Police: Constraints, Dilemmas and Imperatives", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1973), pp. 495-515; and P.D. Sharma, "Police — Panchayati Raj Relations — A Case Study in Rajasthan", *Political Science Review*, vol. 13, nos 1-4 (1974), pp. 210-25.
14. The Indian politicians' uneasy relationship with the police is discussed in D.H. Bayley, pp. 367-69, and for a more recent study of police-public relations see P.D. Sharma, "Perspectives on Indian Police", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1973), pp. 525-29.
15. The general problems of the police and public order maintenance are discussed in D.H. Bayley, pp. 248-82.
16. K.P. Misra, *op cit*; C.P. Bhambri, "Role of Paramilitary Forces in Centre-State Relations", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 April 1978, pp. 735-37; and O. Marwah, "India, Conflicts and the Military and Police in Security Management", in C. Enloe and U. Semin-Panzer, eds., *The Military, Police and Domestic Order — British and Third World Experience*, (London, 1975).
17. The period of Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency Rule and post-emergency politics are well discussed in: R.C. Thakur, "The Fate of India's Parliamentary Democracy", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 49 (1976), pp. 263-93; N.D. Palmer, "India in 1975: Democracy in Eclipse", *Asian Survey*, vol. 16 (1976), pp. 95-110; O. Mendelsohn, "The Collapse of the Indian National Congress", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 51 (1978), pp. 41-66 and H.C. Hart, "The Indian Constitution: Political Development and Decay", *Asian Survey*, vol. 20 (1980), pp. 428-51.
18. Mrs. Gandhi's questioning of the continuing relevance of the Westminster system of democracy to India was reported in *The Times*, 28 Oct. 1980 and *The Sunday Times*, 2 Nov. 1980.

19. K.P. Misra, p. 386.
20. This point has been discussed by the author in: "Protest and Violence: the Police Response", *Conflict Studies*, no.75 (1976).
21. Superintendent Shri S.K. Ghosh, Orissa Police, *Lawbreakers and Keepers of the Peace*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta, 1969), p. 16.

AVERTING ARMAGEDDON¹

by

David Levy

Some important names in the Canadian political establishment have recently spoken out in favour of a special government Peace Tax Fund. In letters to newspapers,² Senator Eugene Forsey and MPs Pauline Jewett, Stanley Knowles, Vic Althouse, Jim Manley, Bob Ogle and Svend Robinson have condemned defence spending as immoral and proposed that like-minded citizens be permitted to elect that an appropriate proportion of their taxes be diverted from arms to "a special government Peace Tax Fund, to be used for peace research, peace education, peacekeeping, peacemaking, development and other constructive uses."³

No one can quarrel with the principle. What I find disturbing is the assumption that seems to underlie the proposal — that the entire blame for the present dire threat of global nuclear destruction rests in the West. For me, the idea of a Peace Tax Fund will become a serious and constructive effort to avert nuclear armageddon only if the Kremlin's iniquities are brought into the same sharp focus as those of the Pentagon. Without such a balance, the public outcry against the nuclear arms build-up seems to me just so much hot air and therefore a thorough waste of precious time.

This spring, a Vancouver newspaper⁴ did signal service in the cause of peace research by publishing "a glimpse of Armageddon" by Vancouver physician Michael Scott, from a West Coast medical symposium on the effects of nuclear war. The shattering realities presented by Dr. Scott pointed to the *probability*, now upon us, that our planet will "flame out like a cosmic flash bulb" at the present rate of nuclear arms growth.

What struck me most about the Scott article, however, was the realization that no such frank discussion of nuclear realities could appear in Soviet newspapers. The pressure for nuclear disarmament is lop-sided, having effect in the West but not in the Soviet Union. This is the substance of my article.

What is needed to halt the dangerous nuclear build-up is some real dialogue with the Russians — not the dialogue that merely offers them a platform for their dreary, self-righteous propaganda; not mindless monologue but meaningful dialogue. And by meaningful I mean *public* dialogue. Not for nothing does Andrei Sakharov, "the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb" now totally at odds