Improving Efficiency and Ensuring Impartiality of the Police Force

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As the Indian Police force assumes an increasingly important role in the life of the nation, it conies under rigorous scrutiny and harsh criticism. What are its weaknesses and strengths? How can the weaknesses be remedied and strengths reinforced?

In this article, G K Valecha and Subha Venkataraman, who have conducted a questionnaire-survey of Inspector Generals and Deputy Inspector Generals, present the perceptions of these high-ranking police officers and some prescriptions.

Discipline, job security, and esprit de corps are the three major strengths identified and corruption, political interference, and poor interaction within the force, the three weaknesses. Delinking police from politics, encouraging participation, recognizing merit in promotion, and improving motivation are suggested as measures to be adopted to improve efficiency and ensure impartiality of the police force.

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There has been a great deal of criticism of the police force in recent times. Police performance is being critically assessed by a section of the public that is discerning and demanding, and the general opinion is that it has not kept pace with the increasing demands made by modern social and industrial conditions. Like many other organizations, the police force has a tendency to cling to the old traditions and practices, it employs personnel poorly suited for the purpose, and works with very little imagination. In the words of Loknayak Jay Prakash Narayan (1978):

... the police in India have continued to remain hamstrung to the procedures and norms of the erstwhile colonial administration. The details of functioning as also the sights of the important limb of the establishment have to be restructured.

The police force seems to be ridden with a multitude of problems; inefficiency, corruption, brutality, and a lack of concern for the public are some of them. The genesis of these problems can be traced to the early history of the police force.

During the British rule the police functioned as an important instrument of oppression of the colonial regime. When India gained her Independence, a change was expected in the role of the police force as well as in the attitude of the government towards it, but neither has come about. Our society has failed to transform the coercive instrument of the colonial power into a socially sensitive service.

Mounting Problems

There has been a considerable increase in the crime rate and lawlessness in the country. The Central Bureau of Investigation indexed 2,448 more international crimes and 7,019 more inter-state crimes in 1982 than it did in 1981. This
increase may be ascribed to an increase in the population (68.40 crore in the 1981 census; 24.78 per cent more than in the 1971 census), increase in unemployment (169 lakh in 1981 census; 34.23 lakh in the 1971 census), and a marked increase in the prices of consumer goods (the all-India general index shows an increase of 29 to 30 points every year). Further, demonstrations arising out of labour disputes, student grievances, and political issues often turn violent. The task of enforcement of economic and social legislations has added new dimensions to police tasks. The law and order problem had long remained an urban phenomenon, but in the recent past the "awakening" in the rural areas has led to bitter and brutal caste and class conflicts. Maintaining law and order, the very task of the police force, has thus become enlarged and at the same time very complex. In view of this, police administration has to be streamlined so that it becomes both effective and efficient.

The fundamental problem today is how to make the police force function as an efficient and impartial law enforcement agency fully motivated and guided by the objectives of serving the public at large and upholding the constitutional rights and liberties of the people, as the National Police Commission (1977) has observed.

The Indian police organization was conceived in 1861 and remodelled in 1902. The 1902 Commission laid down a number of guidelines which have been followed through the years. Later, various commissions, the Khosla Commission, 1966; the Administrative Reforms Commission, 1966; and the National Police Commission, 1977; to name a few, were appointed to probe into the various problem areas of the police force.

It is important to investigate objectively the police administration. Several studies done abroad on the police force—for instance, Baehr et al. (1971); Hogan (1971); and Matarazzo et al. (1964)—have looked into the characteristics of a good or a successful policeman. The qualities and personality traits of a successful policeman that emerge from these studies are high intelligence, self-confidence, sociability, assertiveness, a straightforward and uncomplicated interpersonal style, and a dependable and responsible demeanour. Successful policemen marry early and establish family and are stable, well-socialized and family-oriented. A sense of accomplishment; feeling of being capable; and being logical, intellectual, responsible, self-controlled, and obedient are highly valued. Being independent is not highly valued; nor do the policemen want autonomous work or a chance to make their own decisions.

Gorer (1955), Niederhoffer (1967), Reiss (1967), and Richard (1969) have conducted studies to learn about the motivation to join the force. Their commitment is examined by Van Maanen (1972). But these are the studies done abroad. In India, very few empirical studies have been made of policemen, although there are a few books and a number of articles written by ex-policemen and public servants.

We conducted a study which is discussed in this article.

Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of 22 senior and top officials of the ranks of Inspector Generals and Deputy Inspector Generals from various parts of the country. The group, though small, is a valuable one for its members belong to the higher echelons in the police organization, access to which is difficult.

The officers were between the ages of 40 and 55 years, with more than 50 per cent of them between 45 and 49 years. They had all worked in the police force for more than 20 years. Three of them were graduates with a diploma, and the rest were post-graduates.

Instrument

The group was asked to answer a questionnaire in three parts: A, B, and C. (See the Appendix.) The questionnaire elicited responses on various aspects like commitment, motivation, work climate and environment, and strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and changes that need to be brought about. Responses to questionnaires were collected in a seminar-cum-workshop.
Findings

There were three open-ended questions: the respondents were asked to identify three most significant strengths and weaknesses of the organization and recommend three most significant changes needed in the organization. The responses to each of these questions were analysed with the help of a frequency table, and the three most frequent responses are shown in Table 1. In Part B of the questionnaire, respondents rated the organization on 15 organizational characteristics. The mean ratings and standard deviations were computed for these characteristics. All quantifiable items were rated on a 5-point scale (5 being very high and 1 being very low). The results are shown in Table 2.

Strengths

**Discipline.** As shown in Table 1, many police officers in the upper echelons feel that the major strengths of the police organization are its dutiful, loyal, disciplined, and hard-working employees. Discipline is essential for maintaining high standards in a semi-military or uniformed organization. It ensures prompt obedience to orders at all levels. The average rating of the group on commitment is 4, which indicates a high level of commitment. (Part C, 2) Van Maanen (1972) notes that in order to advance and be accepted within the police system the policeman must exhibit behaviour indicative of a "relatively unquestioning belief in and acceptance of the organizational system." In another study of various occupational groups (1975), he has found that the organization commitment of a police group is higher than that of other groups. This is probably due to the nature of their job which is highly demanding physically and perhaps mentally also. When a high degree of commitment (on the part of the police) is met by hostility and rejection (on the part of the public), cynicism may result, and it often does. On the other hand, if the individual is psychologically healthy, he rises above all this with a renewed sense of commitment.

**Job Security.** A second strength mentioned by the group is job security. Life-long employment and job security have been given the highest rating out of the 15 characteristics rated. Group mean is
4.3 as shown in Table 2. Research abroad—for instance, Gorer (1955); Niederhoffer (1967); Reiss (1967); and Richard (1969)—suggests that the predominant psychological motivation of those joining the police force is a need for job security. Lefkowitz (1974) and Richard (1969) have found that, on the whole, need of the police for job security is well-satisfied. But job security can be both a motivating and a demotivating factor. There can be an optimal extent of job security in most jobs (especially in India); excess can be non-conducive to job effectiveness.

**Esprit de Corps** The next on the list of strengths is esprit de corps, i.e., a jealous regard for the honour and interests of the group one belongs to. It depends to a great degree on the satisfaction its members derive from the feeling of being a part of the group and their confidence in their leader. The picture of the police is that of someone who is proud of his profession and someone who derives pleasure in working with others. This cohesiveness and the sense of belonging could surely contribute to enhanced morale and organizational effectiveness. Cross-checking with the items 13 and 5 in Table 2, we find "atmosphere of togetherness and cohesiveness" and "collective decision making and team work" have mean ratings of 3.22 and 3.09 respectively. This is quite low considering the fact that esprit de corps has been pointed out as a major strength by many in the group. This could be ascribed to the psychology of uniformed services where history, traditions, and practices engender a feeling of oneness. This feeling of oneness is obvious in the face of outside attack, but in their day-to-day working, it seems to be lacking.

**Weaknesses**

**Corruption.** Topping the list of weaknesses is corruption. A rising trend in corrupt practices can be attributed to inflation, a sharp rise in consumer goods prices, and rising expectations on the part of the personnel. The pressure from these factors is felt very strongly by the personnel at the lower echelons of the police force whose salaries are very low. For instance, a municipal sweeper, who works for eight hours a day and has a right to unionize, gets about Rs. 100 more per month than a constable who is rule-bound to be on duty for 24 hours, never paid overtime, and not allowed to join a trade union as Kanetkar (1978) has shown. This is a major factor considering that more than 80 per cent of the police force are constables. Inadequate income is a natural breeding ground for corruption, and when the incumbent is invested with such powers as the power to arrest, detain, search, and prosecute, the scope for corruption is immense.

**Political Interference.** Closely allied to the weakness of corruption is that of political interference. This does not just encompass interference from politicians but also from the affluent, powerful members of society such as industrialists, businessmen, and landlords. They use pressures ranging from a promise of career advancement and preferential treatment in service matters, if the demand is yielded to, and a threat of drastic penal action and disfavoured treatment if it is not, as the National Police Commission (1977) has noted. One of its members, K F Rustamji, observes.

... the senior police officers have been rendered redundant in the day to day working of the police force as their juniors had developed close links with politicians, in order to ensure job security.

**Poor Interaction.** The third weakness is a lack of free expression and communication. Cross-checking with Table 2, we find that the item (No. 9) "simple and open communication channels with free flow of relevant information" has a mean rating of 3.3, and "informal atmosphere, free and frank interaction" (No. 8) has a low rating of 2.89. The picture that emerges is that of an organization which is highly formal, with an authoritarian chain of command. In such an atmosphere there is little scope for creativity and innovation. In the organizational climate scale, creativity, and innovation (No. 12) have a very low mean rating of 2.79. Though there seems to be very little empirical evidence of the authoritarian nature of command in the police organization, a few subjective descriptions (Bordua and Reiss, 1966; Dillman, 1967) subscribe to this view. So we can see that there is a pyramidal structure, and those on the top perhaps have no time or environment for innovation which results in the system becoming outmoded and dysfunctional.
Changes Needed

Delinking Police from Politics. What, in the opinion of the police officials, are the changes that are to be brought about? Insulation from political interference heads the list. In the same vein, the National Police Commission (1977) notes:

... a police force which does not remain outside politics but is constantly subjected to influences and pressures emanating within the system from the politicized police personnel themselves will in turn seriously disturb the stability. If the duly elected political leadership in the state itself and thereby ensure serious damage to the functioning of our democracy.

So a procedure has to be evolved to delink police functioning from political affairs in order that the police gain confidence and trust of the people.

Encouraging Participation. Secondly, there are a few suggestions that can be linked to one another and categorized under the broad heading "organizational restructuring." This consists of points such as "encouragement of free expression," "making the climate less authoritarian," and "making changes in the present organizational set-up," though Cochran (1975) shows that the police prefers rigid, hierarchical organizations where decision making is based on formal power and authority relationships. Walter, McCure, and Trojanowicz (1973) believe that the police prefers to be told what to do and to work within structured situations. The police would like to know what exactly is expected of him rather than involve himself in a participative style of functioning. But times are changing, and the fact that the need for an open and democratic climate is felt by those occupying very high ranks in the police force is significant. It is possible that autonomy and participation will aid those at the top, though the same may not be said for those in the lower ranks.

Recognizing Merit in Promotions. Yet another suggestion that should be given a serious consideration is the need for a more relevant appraisal system and better recognition of merit as indicated by the item "Is the progress and promotion in your organization primarily based on merit and performance?" No. 8 in Part A. More than 50 per cent of the sample answered this in the negative. They believe that promotions are not given impartially; often, they have a communal bias. Research abroad shows (Reiss, 1967) that a majority of police officers are very dissatisfied with their service ratings and promotional examinations which are considered for promotion. Some studies, for instance, Niederhoffer (1967), National Police Commission (1977); and Wilson (1964), find that in the absence of dependable indices of individual performances, there is a widespread conviction among the police that advancement is determined by favouritism and influence. In India it has been noted that the promotional structure within the police system at lower levels is not conducive to the fulfilment of legitimate career ambitions of the constables. Many of them even retire as constables. No system can be healthy if its personnel stagnate in the same rank for nearly 30 years as the National Police Commission (1977) has emphasized. It may be noted that recently there have been some marginal changes in this regard.

Improving Motivation. Closely linked to the issue of recognition of merit and performance is the issue of motivation. The group gave a moderate rating of 3.2 to the Item 6.2 of Part C: the organization's "capitalizing motivation, human talents, and resources." Furthermore, about 60 per cent of the sample felt that the organization received more from the employees than it gave. This is a definite note of dissatisfaction. Such a feeling is likely to lead to the lowering of morale and therefore to inefficiency. A cross-check with "overall efficiency and effectiveness" (Part C, No. 6.4), shows that the group's rating here signified only moderate effectiveness and efficiency (mean score = 3.3). Thus, there seems to be a vicious circle of dissatisfaction, low motivation, low motivation, low efficiency and effectiveness leading to low motivation in turn.

Summary and Conclusions

Even after nearly four decades of Independence, the police force is still burdened with a bad public image. It is discontented. There have been a number of police revolts in the past five years. In Maharashtra alone there have been about 20-odd instances of organized protests by the police. The National Police Commission (1977) notes that the police force is at "a boiling point" and
and its grievances will have to be looked into immediately. All these facts point towards the urgency of change.

While the forte of the police force seems to be its obedient and duty-bound employees who have a feeling of comradeship, their Achilles' Heel appears to be interference from outside, especially from the politicians, and the tendency to corruption. The police organization has an authoritarian structure which allows little free flow of communication. Its appraisal system is such that it results in demotivating the employees. The US Department of Justice notes in "Career Development for Law enforcement" (1973):

"There is a need to prevent the loss of motivation among those who feel they are merely cogs in a wheel which is forever grinding them closer towards retirement."

This situation, called "occupation burnout," must be prevented at all costs, for not only will it damage the individual personality, but also affect the morale of the whole organization.

**Recommendations**

**Recruitment and Training**

There is a need for change at the time of recruitment. Certain character traits should be given appropriate weightage while choosing candidates so as to achieve the right mix of formal education and character. The administrators should look out for people who are sensitive, highly motivated, and have integrity. Psychological tests can be used, in addition to other procedures, to determine their personality makeup and to eliminate unsuitable applicants. According to Bayley (1976), the Japanese police has been considered efficient and very highly disciplined even by American standards. Recruitment in Japan is usually at two levels: (1) patrolmen, and (2) assistant inspectors. For the former, school level education is a must (the school standard in Japan is one of the highest in the world), and for the latter, four years of college education and passing the advanced civil service examination are necessary. Applicants for patrolmen must pass physical, intellectual, and vocational aptitude tests. Extensive checks are made for character. Training is thorough, extensive, and practical. Formal training in a police school lasts for a year, then recruits are sent to the field for a year. They then return to school for a minimum period of three months to reflect on their experiences and receive more training. There is also a considerable amount of in-service training in Japan, and every promotion means a few weeks or months of training.

**Salaries and Benefits**

To attract the best personnel, salaries and benefits will have to be better. The average salary of a policeman is 48 per cent above that of an industrial worker in Japan, the corresponding figure is 44 per cent for the USA. In addition, the policemen enjoy benefits like good housing, educational and medical facilities, and concessional rates in clothing, household appliances, vacation resorts, and hotels. By having a better pay structure, housing facilities, and welfare benefits, a first step towards reducing corruption in the Indian police can be taken. A policeman cannot be convinced that his job is a very special one when he is paid only as much as an unskilled worker. Raising the pay and giving more welfare benefits will result in increasing his self-esteem and prestige in the eyes of others.

**Performance Appraisal**

Performance appraisal, if done scientifically and objectively, and followed up with proper feedback is bound to be effective. With the introduction of sound appraisal system and greater opportunities for career advancement with vertical and lateral mobility, the growth of the individual and that of the organization can be achieved.

**Motivation**

If the police are to play a socially purposeful role they ought to be given more responsibilities and greater recognition which would result in higher esteem and autonomy. The challenges of professionalism could be met if information is shared and consultative processes are used.

**Better Police-Community Relations**

The trend so far in India has been to look down upon the police. If, on their part, the police can consider satisfaction of the citizens as an integral
part of their job, more cordial relations between
the two will result and mutual trust and respect
will grow. For instance, as Bayley (1976) shows,
in Japan, the police operations are not conducted
in an atmosphere of crisis and declining public
confidence. There is a lot of routine, non-
emergency contact between the police and the
public where rapport is established. The police is
looked upon as a friend who listens, counsels,
and mediates. All their prefectures have set up
general counselling offices: komarigoto sodan
(trouble counselling) and kaji sodan (domestic af-
fairs counselling) are its two examples.

Improved Control and Communications

Effective communication plays a very important
role in the police department with its innumer-
able information flows. If a management informa-
tion system can be set up with the help of a
computer—as some states have already done—
modernization would receive an impetus.

If these recommendations are implemented
in the various functions and at the various levels,
not only would the police organization get the
much-needed facelift, the extent of corruption
and political interference would also decrease. It
will give the policemen, especially those police-
men at the lower levels, a new kind or respect. It
will give them something to be proud of. They
would become truly professional. Only a
thoroughly professional policeman can cope with
the complicated problems and societal pressures
that accompany unrest, violence, and crime.

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Appendix

PART A

Tick mark the appropriate answer.

1. Does your organization have any philosophy (that you are aware of)?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

1a. If yes, what according to you, is your organization's philosophy?

1b. To what extent does your organization practice its philosophy?
   5 4 3 2 1
   To a very good extent To a good extent To some extent A little extent Not at all

2. Imagine the ideal organization for which you could be working. Tick mark how you rate your organization related to your ideal.

   Most ideal

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Least ideal

3. Does your organization make you feel significant and important (in your own way) while you perform the job entrusted to you?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

4. Do you have a say in the matters that affect your job?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

5. Do you generally get to know the relevant facts (in proper time) that affect you and your work?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

6. Do you get adequate monetary benefits and returns from your organization?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

7. Is good work and performance recognized and appreciated by your organization?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

8. Is the progress and promotion in your organization primarily based on merit and performance?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

PART B

An excellent organization can be regarded to be an admirable achievement of human endeavour. An excellent organization has many things working 'just right' in an integrated gestalt. One could look at it from the point of view of its philosophy and objectives; the systems, policies and procedures; formal structure; the informal effectiveness; care for its clients and customers; a sense of reciprocity of the best kind between the management and the employees; an awareness of the environment; a commitment to certain cherished ideals; a contributive force striving towards well-being of the society and the happiness of the persons with whom the organization deals; a synergistic functioning of myriad people having varied backgrounds and talents; a harmony that is achieved by the players playing in tune. One could regard an excellent organization as a marvel of accomplishment of human endeavour, the best of what one may subsume under the titles of science as well as art.

Please rate your organization on the following 15 characteristics on a 5-point scale:

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<th>Rate</th>
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<td>V</td>
<td>1. Trust in and respect for people</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>2. Life-long employment and job security</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>3. Training and development of human potentials</td>
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<td>4. Promotions from within</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>5. Collective decision-making and team work</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>6. Autonomy in doing one's job</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>7. Clear, challenging, and achievable objectives</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>8. Informal atmosphere, free and frank interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>9. Simple and open communication channels with free flow of relevant information</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>10. Reinforcement of good performance, appreciation of a job well done</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>11. High action orientation, i.e., there is excitement of things happening</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>12. Creativity and innovation—experimentation is encouraged</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>13. An atmosphere of togetherness and feeling of cohesiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>14. Well thought out systems and stable ways of functioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>15. Customers regarded as important. Service and satisfaction of customers given high priority</td>
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PARTC

1. Name the 3 most significant changes which you would recommend in your organization.
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

2. How do you rate the involvement and commitment (to the organization) of the people at your rank?
   5 4 3 2 1
   | | | | | | | | | | 
   Very High High Moderate Low Very Low

3. What do you consider as the 3 greatest strengths in your organization?
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

4. What are the 3 significant drawbacks in your organization?
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

5. Consider the 'exchange' of the time and effort given by the employees to the organization; and the organization's providing the salary and various benefits, would you consider that:
   a. the organization receives more from the employees than it gives,
   b. the employees receive more from the organization than they contribute,
   c. it is equitable (i.e., both reciprocate to the same extent).

6. Kindly rate your organization on the following dimensions by encircling the appropriate figure.
   (1) Utilization of plant, machinery, equipment, etc.
       5 4 3 2 1
       | | | | | | | | | | 
       Good Fair Poor Losses Heavy

   (2) Capitalizing motivation, human talents, and resources
       1 2 3 4 5
       | | | | | | | | | | 
       Criminal Wastage Moderate Quite Very
       Wastage Well Well

   (3) Role of the Police in civilian/e
       5 4 3 2 1
       | | | | | | | | | | 
       Substantial Increase Constant Decrease Highly Vulnerable

   (4) Overall efficiency and effectiveness
       5 4 3 2 1
       | | | | | | | | | | 
       Very High High Moderate Low Very Low