ABSTRACT

Youth in Hardcore Crime in Mumbai: 
A Developmental Perspective

The present study aims at sequencing the evolution of crime culture in City of Mumbai over decades. It highlights the fact that prior to the sixties, activities of criminals were confined to thefts of goods from the seaport or other conventional crimes, without much severity. It was during the mid-sixties that with the low profile of Indian economy and produced goods of low quality, smuggling of foreign goods attracted the organised crime. Low time criminals took to bootlegging (due to the ban on liquor that time) and smuggling of goods. Once commercial activities in the city grew, they brought with them the property crimes. Since the seventies, Mumbai witnessed the creation of huge wealth by businessmen by fair and foul means. The period also coincided with the growth of real estate for profiteering and speculation. As another aspect of its growth, the city experienced a flood of migrants (from within the state and from states like U.P and Bihar) which led to proliferation of slums all around, and division of people in the city into two groups - a few privileged and a majority of the poor struggling for survival and living in degraded slums.

The organised crime flourished in activities like smuggling of foreign goods, bootlegging, drug trafficking, "hawala" transactions, betting ("matka" playing), prostitution, property related crimes (eviction of tenants, etc). Meanwhile, Indian society in general, and Mumbai City in particular, passed through a phase of decline of moral and political values, widespread corruption in public sector, irresponsible business ethics, criminalisation of politics and criminals turning politicians. All these created a very favourable ground for organised crime to spread its clout in the city. With economic development, the city witnessed the emergence of several gangs of hardcore criminals who amassed wealth through variety of crimes. They became so powerful that they extended their influence to police and government departments and even (to some extent) to the judiciary. Among the respected citizens, the neo-rich class emerged which was as irresponsible in violating the law as the organised
criminals. Such an opportunistic culture gave full birth to a series of criminal gangs which not only established a deep rooted crime culture in the city, but also attracted the disillusioned youth to join their ranks, more so in the rackets of collecting "hafta" (protection money) and the "extortions". The present study describes the succession of heinous acts of earlier mafia-kings like Vardharajan, Yusuf Patel, Haji Mastan of the previous decades (70's & 80's), and the recent dons like Karim Lala, Amar Naik, Arun Gawli, Abu Salim, Chhota Rajan, Chhota Shakil and, perhaps the most influential one, Dawood Ibrahim. The crime world threatened the very fabric of Mumbai life, with the result that the police was given 'free hand' in eliminating the hardcore criminals. In last four to five years, Mumbai Police has killed more than 300 such criminals in 'encounters'. Over 200 criminals also died in inter-gang warfare.

One of the very disturbing recent trends of the evolution of crime culture in City of Mumbai is more and more involvement of the youth in hardcore crimes. Lured by making the fast-buck through joining the underworld, disillusioned with their poor life situations, mesmerized by glamorous consumer culture in the city, anonymity of life, degraded living in slum areas, defiant & daring personalities of such youth and such other factors are identified by the Police Department, the Press and experts in the field as the factors for taking youth to such acts. Are these sufficient causes for understanding criminal behaviour of such youth? Or, is there much more to be attributed to their acts? These were the crucial issues, which needed to be understood. The present study has made an attempt in this direction. For the purpose, case studies were carried out by the researcher of some 20 hardcore young criminals who were interviewed intensively while they were in the police custody or in jail or on bail. Though the case studies are not meant to generalise on the possible causes for their criminal behaviour, they proved to be useful in gaining further insights into the phenomenon.

The presented case studies, once decoded, brought out some salient features of entry of the youth in hard-core crime. Broken homes, poor education, insecure and inhuman living conditions in slums with ample vices practised by all the age groups,
adventurous and ambitious adolescent youth, glamour of consumer culture, joblessness and uncertainty of future, contact persons of the underworld in slums, over-crowded city with anonymity of life, vulnerable law and order agencies and corrupt political leaders, appear to be a few conducive factors for such a process. However, the main factor for the evolution of crime culture and its influence on the youth of Mumbai City appears to be the creation of wealth, more so through unethical means and within broad capitalist formations — under the paradigm of 'development'. The study draws attention of researchers in the field to focus on the 'political economy of crime' in cities like Mumbai and Delhi.