Chapter - 7
POLITICAL INTERFERENCE ON POLICE

In a democracy like that of in India, the relation between the Police and the Politician is conditioned by the need to ensure the efficiency and impartiality of the Administrative agency on the one hand, and its responsibility and accountability to the people on the other hand. The achievement of these conditions requires delicate and careful study.

I. POLICE AND POLITICS:

Politics and police acquire and aspire for power and therefore one related to each other. "The police are related to power in two ways by their way of exertion they deny unconstitutional power to others, while at the same time, they have legal power to do their constitutional duty". That is not all. Police form coercive arm of state power and also act as a bitter among the contenders of power specially when race for succession is not clear cut and is contested cliquishly and unscrupulously.

Policing in different countries opine that the creation of police force in any society is to be understood in political terms as they are creation of politics. Political criminality and methods of controlling them say that the ultimate rationale and purpose of policing is to preserve, against radical changes, those cultural and social structures which are congruent with some historically specific polity. Policing is the institutionalised development and use of ‘methods of compulsion and suppression’ to control those who live within jurisdiction of a politics. Police forces are designed for the use on behalf of the politics of social order and continuity and they are never really neutral.

This may be true, in general, to a great extent. But group activities of police into ‘service’ activities comprising of protection, emergency, assistance and guidance on the one side and ‘control’ activities comprising of intelligence, gathering information
control, neutralisation of offenders on the other side, we can see that policing is different orientation in a democratic and totalitarian societies. In democratic polity the service functions are made mandatory and are given more importance to ensure safety of life, liberty and property of individuals. But in totalitarian society, control functions are given more importance and service functions may not be mandatory. Though both are complimentary to each other, the proportionate allocation of police resources to service and control activities vary between democratic totalitarian societies depending upon the degrees of perceived threat and the established theory and practice of control. The conditions prevailing in India is clear example of this. With terrorism becoming order of the day in most of the States, police are more and more involved in control functions rather than service functions.

II. POLICE AND POLITICIANS :

The interaction between a policeman and a politician depend on their respective rank, status and public activity. Sometimes, clash of personal ego between them overrides all other considerations, especially when they wish to be effective and powerful in public eye. Police and politicians are most exposed to public view in a democracy. They need to manage their selective disclosures. Sensitivity of police and politicians perceptions heightens as their survival becomes more critical on public approval or acceptance. Local media devilishly fish on these uneasy waters. They have been more and more growing awareness among police and politicians to back up each other and save their exposed sides, as far as possible, by supporting each other and by serving their mutual interests. Where this happens public suffers due to such an alliance. People don’t find anyone to champion their cause and in turn get exploited both by police and politicians. Police get protection from politicians and politicians got their interests served through police. This alliance is kept hidden from the public view and never openly declared. Policemen, if they do not please, politicians are soon to find their hands in a hornet’s nest. However juggling with all kinds of politicians is not always easy and policemen are least trained to play politics. The development has given rise to a new kind of police entrepreneurship in politics. Talks about these enterprising police officers and unscrupulous politicians become a staple feel for corridor gossips or
informal in nuendoes. A police-politician clash sometimes between unavoidable and when it takes place, police wreckage keeps floating for quite sometime until another collision eclipses the former. Rarely a police officer comes out as unseated out of political confrontation.

Indian politics is a strange phenomenon; it builds itself on negative planks. “It thrives on charges of skullduggery: The police provide a convenient accation”. The policy of police neutrality in politics is a facade of duplicity, a double dealing and double talk. In India, police are for a person, for a party, or for a power.

Sometimes police officers like politicians are the product of their times. The younger officers “are more accustomed to the frenzy and fanatism of political life and they perceive no loss of respect or prestige, no clippings of their wings, because a democratic environment is all they have known”. The democracy seems to be taking roots as people, police and politicians are adjusting to each other. “Just as politicians seek to use police for their purpose, so policemen sometimes seek to use politicians for theirs”.

There is another group of people or class of people that exist between police and politicians, the class of ‘Brokers’. Due to historic reasons people are reluctant to approach authorities directly by themselves. “Indians by and large are exceedingly unsure of themselves in approaching people in the positions of formal authority. May be their world is a small one and manipulation of non-village administrative structure. It is beyond their capacity; therefore there is a need of ‘Intermediates’ or ‘Brokers’ or ‘Local bosses’ or ‘Dalals’ and ‘Mediators’.

Most of the police-politician problems are due to lack of understanding the police role, of any agreed definition of police work and due to exploitation of institutional malevolence for political purposes. The police force affects politics, by nature of its activity; by the manner of its operation; by the nature of the organisation and by the socialization of its members. Police enforce not only criminal and local laws but also, social, industrial, economic and moral legislations. In 1977 change accrued in
political leadership at the national level for the first time hunting followed at a large scale. Police officers suspected for active association with dethroned political party were discriminated; the noted few were arrested and prosecuted.

Unlike in the United States Police are not elected officers in India. Unlike in United Kingdom Police are responsible to the political administration as well as being accountable to law. Thus the police come into contact with politicians of all shades of all levels, almost every day in their work. At the highest level, the Director-General of Police or Inspector-General of Police or Commissioner of Police or the Deputy Inspector-General of Police (Intelligence) meet the Chief Minister and other Ministers quite often and almost every day when the Legislature is in Session either for briefing them on various matters affecting crime, law and order atrocities on weaker sections and so on or on specific issues which come up, or incidents on which a reply is to be given in the legislature. Such constant interaction is double edged. The politicians who meet the policemen as well as the policemen who meet the politicians are both conditioned by each other’s thinking and views. On several occasions Government’s view on any police matter is conditioned by the official version while the officers in turn and conditioned by political thinking in their attitudes to events. This, to a large extent is a healthy interaction because in a democracy police cannot function in isolation nor is it possible to insulate police from the society or leaders of the society in which they have to function. However, there are inherent evils in this as has been evident. There are occasions where the officers concerned or the politicians concerned to use such occasions for personal needs such as the officer’s own placement or career protected or for placement of some amenable policemen is the politician’s constituency or far some intervention in some crime involving the politician’s supporters and so on. As long as the interaction is for common good it is a welcome thing but there is reason to believe that individual gains are being gives more importance than common good in the changing socio political context. This contact between the politicians and policemen is not only at the top but extends down the line. Officers at various levels are in constant touch with the politicians in district, mandals or villages.
In this context the working of the Intelligence Branch at the Centre or the Special Branch in the State is viewed with alarming suspicion by many politicians, particularly of the opposition. It had its use in the British era when the administration wanted to keep surveillance over the independence movement and the leaders of the movement. In Independent India, however, in theory there should not have been any need for political intelligence. In a democracy, the opposition political parties have the liberty of trying to bring down a Government by democratic means. Freedom of speech, movement and assembly are fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of India. Whether the Government formed by 'X' party or 'Y' party it is a democratic Government formed by people of Independent India and is not an alien Government. However, all these concepts, accepted by all, remain as theory.

The system developed by British was accepted and adopted by rulers of Independent India for entirely different reasons. The functions of the Intelligence Branch or Special Branch in the State, as it used to be called earlier, are today mainly related to political intelligence. This is a grey area of police functioning and not many policemen themselves are aware of all that is being done by the intelligence wing of the police. Some of the police officers feel that the Intelligence wing even keeps a watch on their movement. It may be an exaggerated view, but it cannot be denied that the Intelligence Branch whether at the Centre or in the State watches the movements of all political leaders, trade leaders, communal party leaders and so on. It is even said that even prominent leaders of the ruling party holding a different view point from the leader, (termed dissidents) were or are being watched. The opposition parties apart from criticising this system for form's sake do not seem to see anything wrong in it. Whenever any opposition party won power and formed the Government it also followed the same system of maintenance of surveillance over the erstwhile ruling party members. Thus whatever be the shade of the party or ideology of the party, all political parties seem to believe in the system and there is no likelihood of the Intelligence Branch being wound up or its powers and duties curtailed.

In the present context and the present day social and political environment this idea of police functioning is taken for granted by all. Whether it is ethically correct is
not a matter of relevance of any one; nor does anyone in authority or out of it pause to think of the eroding effect it has on the value system itself in the police.

A number of examples could be given in this context; and these are from all over the country, not limited to any state or rule by any particular political party. It is, however not desirable to be specific, it would suffice if one were to cite the examples of changes in the personnel, particularly those heading the police and more specifically the intelligence wing of the police, whenever a new party came to power. There have been many instances of this happening even when a new Government is formed by the same party came to power. A Corollary of this is the high degree of subjectivity. It is seen in placements at various levels, irrespective of seniority or competence, in almost all states in the Country. This has certainly created a feeling of cynicism in the minds of a large number of officers in the IPS cadres of the State particularly those who happen to be senior to the officers selected thus. A large number of junior officers on the other hand, have started to cultivate politicians in order that their present or future career prospects may not suffer. This has had a chain reaction down the line in the force with the result that at every level there is a police-political nexus and placements of even subordinate officers at the level of Head Constables and Constables. They are sometimes made for on political consideration, what is even more regrettable is that these are not limited to the ruling party but all opposition parties have some nexus of the other with the police officers. This situation has certainly eroded the morale of the force and has also affected the professionalism, which has to be the hallmark of any policemen, since competence or ability for a given job are no longer the criteria for placements. Policemen take consolation from the fact that they are not alone in this kind of political nexus but that all departments in Government and the IAS itself are alto a lesser or greater degree politicised. This may be a consolation to the police but it is by no means of any consolation for any student of public administration nor should it be for any citizens who is interested in good administration. Police cannot be and should not be isolated and insulated from society of which they are apart and which they serve but they should certainly be insulated against politicisation. Since amongst the many allegations made against police is the one that police are tools in the hands of politicians, this insulation is very much necessary if police image is to improve.
III. THE POLICE AS AN ISSUE:

Politicians are ready to condemn the police and do so loudly and fairly regulatory. Police have served as the issue sparking some of the most unruly scenes in the State Legislatures as well as the national are constantly being filed by Legislators hoping to ventilate sine alleged injustice perpetrated by the police. On these occasions tempers run high and walkouts by the opposition are common. Budget debates, have been disrupted and violent accusations flung back and forth across the floor. Often so many legislators wish to speak on the police, to recount iniquities in their own constituencies, that a rigid time limit has had to be enforced and many legislators have not been given a chance to speak. Probably the greatest emotion is generated over instances of police violence against private individuals in police stations or against groups, particularly students, in public places. At these times tempers know no restraints, and ruling party and police are lumped together as conspirators in a vast plot against the freedom of political parties and of individual citizens. In true opposition style, faults of the police are laid at the door of the ruling party. Others however, carefully dissociate government from the police and proceed to cite instances from their own experience of indefensible police behaviour. Indeed, except for the few supporters of the police, it would be difficult to distinguish between ruling party members and opposition simply by reading spoken remarks made in legislatures about the police.

There are several recurrent themes in criticism of the police by legislators. Corruption is one. Members mention ubiquitous demands by police for a gratuity before complaints are recorded at the police station. If money is not forthcoming the complaint is rejected, lost, or mistakenly noted. Police are accused of being in the employ of wealthy and influential persons. Police suppress facts about crimes and minimize the nature of crime. The stock example is that murders are recorded as dacoits. Another theme is that police are an arm of the ruling party or, in factionalized states, of the opposing section of the party. Members recount in tremendous detail the harassment to which they or their friends were subjected by the police acting on behalf of the political opposition. Police followed them about, asked questions at awkward
moments, threatened supporters, of filed false charges against them. Police are also portrayed as grossly inefficient and unable to maintain even minimal conditions of security in rural areas. The picture one gets is of vast areas of the country completely helpless before the depredations of the armed dacoit or vicious goonda. The methods of the police, when they do decide to do their job, are portrayed as completely primitive, unscientific, and based largely on the use of threats and torture. Stories of venerable old men, helpless mothers, and sweet virgins manhandled by the police crop up again and again. Finally, the police force is a notorious sheltering place for known criminals and bad characters. Money and power count in the countryside and successful criminals have both. Therefore the police are often found covering up their misdeeds and willfully failing to investigate or prosecute.

The touchstone of debates about police is invariably the issue of public cooperation. Government admits many of the defects so dramatically charged. If specifics are given, it promises a prompt and thorough investigation. The skepticism with which this is greeted is monumental. But, government goes on, many of the defects found in the police are the result of widespread lack of cooperation by the mass of the people. For example, if the public will not come forward within formation, police have no choice but to deal with anti-social elements. Similarly, the uneducated policeman may be tempted to apply force to get a conviction if he cannot obtain cooperative independent witnesses. If the public in India would provide the ready cooperation of the Britishers or Americans, then the Indian police would not have to stoop so low and new habits would have an opportunity to take root. The opposition, says the government, would better serve the cause of police reform by helping to develop increased cooperation rather than by continually brow-beating the police with malicious, intemperate and unfounded charges. The opposition gives this argument short. The prerequisite for willing cooperation, they say, is a police force that enlist respect and trust. How can the people be expected to volunteer when police are so demonstrably partial, venal, brutal and stupid? The government must undertake to reform the police throughout; then it can expect cooperation. In short, the government calls for increased public cooperation is the precondition of police reform and the improvement of public safety; the opposition asks for reform first and then promises
generous cooperation. In each case, the protagonists their arguments flung against the other side, the opposition to charge the ruling party with neglect of police affairs and the ruling party to charge the opposition with irresponsible and inflammatory criticism.

Government, opposition and ruling party members usually join hands in deploiring the conditions of pay and amenities of lower ranking policemen. They describe these men as harried, overworked, underpaid, ill clothed, poorly housed, inadequately cared for medically, and unable to educate their children. In this case political expediency and genuine need combine to produce at least the protestations of concern.

Policemen are pained by the hostility shown them in legislative debates but are not inclined to blame their financial difficulties on this. They do say that immediately after independence some politicians took out past grievances against the police by pursuing a vindictive, miserly policy. But this has passed, they believe, and the low budgetary allocations must be attributed to the fact that police belong to a "non-plan" department. Resources and scarce and are allocated firstly for development and welfare activities. The police must be content with the minimum amount considered sufficient to maintain general order and stability. While the opposition may try to cut the budget, more usually they accept what government proposes, bemoaning the lack of return for their rupees, but seemingly willing to pay if it will improve the situation in their area.

The police have rarely been made an election issue. If there has been a dramatic confrontation between police and public in an area of a particularly spicy instance of brutality, then the police may become a stump issue. By and large it seems that there is little mileage to be gotten out of criticism of the police on the hashtings. The issue is tired, the particulars are repetitions, and few people expect any significant changes to occur. Bread-and butter issues are more important. The only other occasion for public ventilation of criticism against the police comes as a part of a campaign of public protest. Then the police are signaled out as the arch villains, speaker after speaker mounting the bullock cart to denounce repression and to liken the police to their counterparts during British rule.
There can be no doubt that politicians are sensitized to the police as an issue, although not one to be used very much during election campaigns. Politicians can recite a catalogue of police faults automatically. And they will do so with very little urging. By attacking the police, they attack the government. In sum, the noise made by politicians about police is considerable.

IV. POLITICAL INTERFERENCE:

Political interference on police is one of the recurrent themes in any discussion on matters relating to police. It is considered as major limiting factor in police functioning leading to their increased inability to control crime in the society. Factors like lack of good leadership in police, reasonable conditions of service, adequate training to meet the emerging challenges, lack of proper protection when firm action is taken by the police etc., are also often cited as causes for police inefficiency and presence of a poor image in the minds of general public. But the discussions always centre round political influence on police and interference in Policing.

In democracy following the Anglo-Saxon Model, the police are expected to function independently owing their allegiance to the principle of rule of law, in reality, particularly or seen in present day in India, would their independence greatly thwarted by interference of politicians both within and outside the government in their official capacities. When such interferences affect their normal functioning, their professionalism, and when it affects their image in the minds of the citizens, there is every reason to view it as major problem.

Political interference in police may have serious repercussions, a fact that the revelations of emergency excesses have already established. The Patiala incident in 1986, Babri-Mashid incident in 1992 and Uttara Khand incident in 1994, which sparked off a series of agitations against police in the country, was the ugliest manifestations of political interference. It was pointed out that there was several incidents in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh which were never publicized. Political interference in police system has
increased greatly\(^8\) and added to that it is very difficult unless a fool-proof system is created which would insulate the police from politicians, particularly when politicians feel that, as elected representatives of the people, they have every right to control and interfere whenever necessary in the affairs of all the organs of the government including the peace. It is very difficult to expect politicians to leave police which has so much visible coercive power to maintain their given independence and neutrality. Moreover, more and more criminals, who have hitherto controlled politicians through money and muscle power, have started entering politics and many of them have started entering politics and many of them have become legislatures and some even Ministers. They know that the police can do and with legitimacy obtained by their election they try to control the police to suit their whims and fancies. This has greatly changed the nature of political interference in policing. Earlier, politicians interfered only when the interests of their party men are affected, say for example in an union election. But now even in case of ordinary crimes like roadside violence, theft, cheating, burglary etc., interference by politicians could be seen. Selling of illicit liquor, narcotic drugs etc., are carried out with the help of political patronage and when police take action, influential politicians interfere and obstruct the part of social welfare and justice. This type of widespread political interference affects policing to a great extent as their professionalism, morale, faith in rule of law, faith in public etc., dismisses leading to complete apathy to what is happening in and around them. The common man also loses faith in the police after seeing instances where policemen deny protective and preventive action to him against activities of criminals due to political interference.

The police are made to involve more in political tasks resulting in the force being torn between the ruling and opposition parties leading them with little will, resource and energy to tackle their professional tasks of prevention and detection of crime.\(^9\) Police collapsed in Delhi after Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination and the consequent riots show how the police have become inactive and more dependent on executive-cum-political direction to control the situation leading to spread of mass violence and disorder. Steady declining in performance and dependability of the police is evidenced by such incidences of mass disturbances and such instability of police may become the biggest single weakness of the Indian Polity.
Political interference implies containing the Police to act in certain manner according to wishes of politician who may or may not be placed in the circle of hierarchy of the ruling or opposition party, or exercise of political influence, irrespective of the party to which he belongs. The method and extent of interference differ from situation to situation, depending on the approach of political party concerned. Today, whenever a man is in trouble or has an axe to grind, he immediately gets in touch with the local political leader or manages an approach to a political leader with a view to activating the local police take cognisance of a case or to take some effective action to the detriment of the opposite party. The political leader weighs in turn his political interests and standing of the complainant. The final action initiated by the politicians. The interference may be comes from different kinds of people, most of them playing a political role in the scene of dealing in power and influence in order to achieve a position of authority and possibly of watch. Most pressure in quantitative terms comes from ‘local bosses’. These individuals may hold contacts with political party and serve to link specific villages, regions, or caste with the formal echelons of political authority. These are ‘bosses’ in the true sense; their authority is derived from their ability to deliver votes for their political patrons. M.L.A’s are probably next in importance in the contact hierarchy. They have direct links with Ministers through political parties. Since police and law enforcement is a State subject, they are the shortest routes between constituent and the police affairs. M.P’s are more out of touch with day to day enforcement concerns of their constituents and their effective sphere of action is not state matters but national.

Influence is exerted in different ways. Rarely in an outright threat or even an explicit request involved. M.L.A.’s and State Ministers simply call up a Superintendent and reveal that such and such is pending and that they are interested and will watch closely. They may disguise their purpose by pointing out aspects of the matter they thought the Superintendent would want to know. If the politician is powerfully situated the Superintendent cannot forget his presence.
The success of political interference in achieving its objectives depend upon the character of leadership in the police and in a State's political parties. Most IPS and IAS Officers realize their responsibility. They know that if they fail to defend wounded subordinate morale within their organisation will crumble over night.

The leadership is far from inspiring. Superiors are unable to ensure exemplary discipline and implicit obedience. Indeed, a police chief feels insecure with the threat of an unceremonious exist on the slightest protest. He is, therefore, unable to insist on rigid discipline and regimentation. Often, transfers and postings or subordinates are given affect to without consulting him. Shrewd subordinates identify the real seat of power and try to cultivate political connections, short-circuiting the department hierarchy. Indeed, the chiefs authority is drastically undermined and he exists virtually as a mere figure-head. Whenever lawlessness breaks out and the police come under criticism, there is speculation about the Chief's replacement. Political masters often find him a handy scapegoat.

Many self-speaking policemen are keen an obliging political masters. In fact, political bosses want plain leaders to serve their interests. As a result, upright and consciousness officers are side-tracked and they languish in innocuous positions. Hence, leadership remains in the hands of either sycophants or mediocres who are incapable of inspiring in the rank and file loyalty and obedience that will ensure healthy policing. Deficient leadership backed by political patronage is unable to face a crisis that threatens peace and order.

A nexus between politicians and shrewd policemen ruins the public cause. At the than level, sometimes booty is shared with the local politicians to keep the officers secure. The black sheep know that as long as the political bosses are kept in good humour the top brass can hardly point a finger at the defaulters in spite of their gross misdemeanour and utter disregard to public service. The idea to serve the interest of the political matters triumphs relegating the thought of public service.
The feverish haste with which so many senior posts are created is sometimes to accommodate the 'Yes man'. It is a handle to oust the chief who wants to assert and uphold rectitude. If 'A' is not willing to toe the line, 'B' is readily available to step into his shoes and serve the political master ungrudgingly. Secondly, it has put the subordinates in a quandary. The flexibility of command has given them an impetus to obey the superiors half-heartedly. Their loyalty is divided and they do not know whom to obey and who their future master is.

In the past, an aggrieved citizen could either write to or meet the Inspector-General for redress. Today, the citizens has to find out who is dealing with crime, law and order or traffic problem etc., and whether he is holding office in the police headquarters or in a private rented building located somewhere in the town. Unlike in the good old days, a petitioner seeking remedy now has to move from place to place, office to office to locate the right IGP for relief. Urgent letters addressed to the police headquarters may or may not reach the IGP concerned. Delay and confusion often defeat the purpose and fail to provide relief to the needy.

Undoubtedly, political interference has substantially effected the police performance. Political masters want the police bureaucracy to the amenable to their wishes, in fact, control over the police ultimately helps to neutralise political opponents. In the rural areas, the influence of an officer-in-charge of a police station is not negligible and the police can easily fabricate criminal cases, harass, or arrest persons on flimsy grounds and humble political rivals and their whiz-kids. The support of the police right from top to the police station level is essential for the party in power. The demand for an OIC according to the choice of the local politicians often dejects the police chief. Incidentally, the support of the dissident politicians is often gained by posting the OICs to the police stations according to the latter's whim. In short, the desire of a politician decides the rise and fall of an OIC. Similarly, if the police chief is unable to toe the line, he is likely to be shifted and placed in insignificant posts, such as Manual Revision, Home Guards, Welfare etc.
It needs no reiteration that a clean and dependable police force is needed for the country’s progress and prosperity. Therefore, the evils discussed here have to be wiped out and the police image has to be refurbished. The established hierarchy built up by years of wisdom should be allowed to function, free from extraneous pressure and interference. The police chiefs must enjoy a fixed tenure so that they are immune to any threat and can function without fear or favour. Since the concept of leadership is paramount, the leaders should be allowed to look after the welfare of the man under them. Incidentally, the age-old practice in this respect has been working very well. Barring a few, most of the leaders were darlings of the force and their graciousness is still remembered. Pertinently, none will be safe and protected under indisciplined, inefficient and dishonest police. Hence complacency should be given up, the police has to be reformed and toned up and in this pursuit politicians have to play a pivotal role.

VI. INFERENCE :

The relations between police and politicians are not encouraging today. Politicians are critical of the police and the police are angry or cynical about the self-seeking politicians.

Relations between politicians and police personnel are in a time of testing with accommodation among various elements yet to be worked out. The police have been discredited by their colonial past and present defects in practice; politicians have been discredited by their unscrupulousness, partiality and parochialism. The problem is to establish a stable equilibrium between two imperfect faces so as to serve the public interest.

There is appreciable evidence of successful political interference in police affairs, some of which have produced injustices and weakened the morale of the force. The public at large believes political interference efficacious, but this has not noticeably improved their confidence in either the police or politicians. In fact, it may have redoubled their anxieties about other people using influence to gain an unfair advantage.
REFERENCES:


4. Ibid., p.377.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p.379.

7. Baylay, H. David in his “POLICE AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT” emphasises that what police are influenced by their political environment. The nature of political life is also substantially influenced by police.
