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Police system during ancient India

Origin of police can be traced to the early Vedic period as the Rig and the Atharva Veda mentions certain kinds of crimes known to the Vedic people. In fact, evidence indicates the existence of security forces even in the Harappan period. Though the exact reference of the criminal justice organization during the Vedic period is not available, the Mauryan period exhibits important features of the same. Kautilya's Arthashastra (310 BC) is a treatise on the criminal justice system. It reads like a manual for police in modern times. There is a reference to DANVARIKA, ANTEVANSIKA, PRADESIKAS, MAHAMATRAS, RAJJUKAS, and so on. There were 3 types of police—dandpal, durgapal, and antpal.

Magasthenese, the GREEK Ambassador, and Fa Hein, the Chinese traveller have written detailed accounts of the Gupta administration. Dandikas were the highest officers then. Others like Nagar Shreshthi, Rabasika, also find mention. The criminal justice system developed during this period continued for five to six hundred years. The only difference between the two periods being that the Mauryan system was centralized whereas the Gupta system was decentralized. But the basic structure of the police system of village police, city police, and palace police was the same, suitably altered by various kings.

Police system during medieval India

There is no mention of police organizations found anywhere. It may be so because more focus was on conquests and military occupation without any serious attempt to consolidate or run civil

administration. The Muslim conquerors did try to implant the police system in line with one prevailing in their homeland trying to fit it with the Indian social setting. The system of administering justice, punishment, and policing was, however, Islamic and was based on the Holy Quran. During the Sultanate period, the Hindu population was subjected to a different law and the Pandits were associated to interpret the Hindu law and to give their opinion on it. Muhtasibs, Muqaddams, were ranks of officials in charge of administration.

Punishments were very harsh, following the Islamic law, such as flaying alive, cutting of nose, ears, or forearms, trampling by elephants, and mutilation. All this must have led to the generation of deep-rooted hatred for the police functionaries.

During this period the center of power and political activity was the Sultan, Faujdar being the head of the criminal justice delivery system at the provincial level entrusted to maintain its peace and security. Kotwal was magistrate, head of the police, and municipal officer, all rolled into one. Chaukidar was responsible for the village administration. The government under the Mughals was autocratic and military in nature. Justice delivery system and police organizations both were weak during this period.

Police system in modern India

British India Phase

After the British victory in 1757 at Plassey and the decline of the Mughal Empire, whatever police system was then in vogue became further corrupted in the area.

In 1862, the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code came into force. The Evidence Act was enforced in 1872 and thus the Qazis, the Muftis, the Pandits along with the Islamic law and the Hindu law got replaced. Though changes were made in the administrative functioning by the Britishers yet the Mughal framework for policing was retained. Ranks such as Kotwals, Thanedar, Pargana, Darogah, continued. However, changes slowly came in the Perso-Arabic model and the British way of policing was adopted.

Pre Independence Era

By the early 19th century the Mughal empire started disintegrating and till the middle of the 19th century, there was no satisfactory police system primarily because of British inexperience and lack of knowledge about the country. Zamindars retained policing till 1792 when Cornwallis was sent to India as Governor-General. He abolished the zamindari system and made Thanedars responsible for the maintenance of law and order. Some other reforms were also introduced. Later, a model of policing developed by Napier culminated into the Indian Police Act of 1861, on which the current police system is also based.

Indian Police Act of 1860

After the revolt of 1857, the British realized the threat of losing power and were determined to ensure complete suzerainty and suppression of all challenges to their power. Thus, a Police Commission was appointed in 1860, to make police an efficient instrument for the prevention and detection of crime.

However, the system so designed was sharply opposite to that of the Britishers, celebrated in the whole world as a symbol of democratic policing. The primary objective was to meet the exigencies of trade and company profit and to ensure that the trade route was safe, exploitation

of resources continued unhindered. This system was based on the structure developed by the Mughals in the 17th century incorporating many features and names of officials like Daroga, Faujdar, and Kotwal. The Act imposed in the whole country a uniform police system. It relieved the District Magistrate of his duty to keep a check over the local police and made it more professional, organized, and disciplined in nature. The system of policing instituted by the Act is still in force and brought uniformity in administration. However, the general conditions of crime control remained unsatisfactory probably due to poverty, famine, and other adverse conditions like shortage of force. The second All India Police Commission was formed in 1902 to conduct a comprehensive inquiry and recommend improvement in various aspects of the organization. But nothing concrete was done according to the recommendations to improve the forces till independence.

After 1920, the imperial forces were open for the Indians through entrance examinations. Indianisation of the services remained very slow despite pronouncements and recommendations. Due to the unavailability of Europeans, more Indians started getting appointed to the services later. After independence, India adopted the 1861 system unaltered in any basic respect.