

# The police we need

India requires a police force that is responsive and respected and not one that is feared, as is the case today



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Ranjeeta Sharma, an Indian Police Service (IPS) probationer from Haryana, bagged the honour recently of commanding the passing-out parade at the National Police Academy (NPA). She won two awards: the Best All-round IPS Probationer and the Sword of Honour for the Best Outdoor Probationer. Interestingly, the honour of being the Best Probationer went to a woman officer, Kiran Shruthi, last year too.

## The ideal police officer

The choice of the probationer commanding the passing-out parade is reasonably objective. It takes into account both the outdoor performance and classroom performance of a trainee. The probationer cannot be a mere bookworm or a brawny athlete excelling in activities such as ceremonial parade or horse riding; he or she is expected to be an all-rounder. The Best Probationer award recognises good conduct, empathy and a quick reflex. These are the ideal qualities of the police who are required to intervene in dangerous situations and also go to the rescue of the poorest when they are harassed by anti-social elements.

The most positive feature today is that many IPS officers are technology savvy. This augurs well for the future of law enforcement in India. Even the lower rungs of the police, who do not belong to the elitist IPS, are avid in the use of technology, especially for regulating public assemblies and solving crimes.

India stands out for entrusting independent responsibility to IPS officers even in the early years of their induction. This is why an IPS assignment is not only prestigious but is laden with unparalleled trust in an inexperienced youth just out of university. Only a few come in with previous work experience.

However, it is distressing to note the declining levels of integrity among senior IPS officers who are expected to be role models for their junior colleagues. Recently, a case of alleged extortion was registered against a former Mumbai Police Commissioner. A senior IPS officer in Tamil Nadu was recently served a charge sheet in court in connection with a case pertaining to the sexual harassment of a woman officer. Nothing can be more disgraceful for a premier police force.

Glittering passing-out parades therefore seem mere window dressing. The NPA has

the greatest role in building character. This is where its success is only modest.

What does an average citizen want from the police? Citizens desire a friendly police force which treats the rich and poor alike. They would also like to see less rapacious police stations where they receive service to which they are entitled, without having to pay any bribe. Except in a few places in the country, most citizens don't get all this.

We are still a country where crime against women is high. Arguing that this is the case in many other countries is no consolation. While many quote data, we would like not to do that since the available data have many issues: there is under-reporting of cases, and the police often refuse to register complaints made. We would rather go by perceptions about the police capacity and interest. The popular belief is that India is still not safe for women. The gang rape and murder in 2012 of a young woman in Delhi left an indelible scar not merely on the face of the Delhi Police but on the whole Indian police force. This is just one example – there are many more.

## Occupying public positions

In this context, it is important to mention the management of police personnel. In an ideal world, brilliant and straightforward officials would be chosen to occupy public positions calling for objectivity and skill. Unfortunately, this is not the case with IPS appointments. Many officers are given plum posts based on their links and loyalty to the ruling party. A silver lining, however, is the Supreme Court mandate laying down the process for selection of Director General of Police. The State government now has to make the appointment from a panel of three names approved by the Union Public Service Commission. This will ensure that no outrageous appointments are made.

Ultimately it is the honest and hard-working officer at the top who will make the difference between good and tendentious policing. India needs a police force that is responsive and respected and not one that is feared, as is the case now. But for that, we need to know why some young men and women officers with a distinguished educational record and who often come from middle and lower sections of the society deviate from the path of virtue after solid training at the NPA. Is this because of faulty selection or poor supervision? Or is it due to the fact that new arrivals no longer have role models like the ones we had in the past?

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