



Cultural roots of police corruption in India

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Abstract *Corruption within the Indian police organization is not a new phenomenon and folklore has always associated police with extortion and brutality. At present, corruption exists in many forms and in every rank and has reached an alarming stage where some practices are not even considered deviant. This paper argues that such pervasive corruption is an expression of the organizational culture that has its roots in the British Raj. The paper, based upon an insider's viewpoints, describe some unusual forms of corruption and suggest how these emanate from organizational practices that have continued unchanged for more than a 100 years.*

Corruption within the Indian police is well recognized and pervasive. Corruption exists within every rank, from the constable to the chief of police and in every police department of the country. Such pervasive corruption flourishes because of an organizational culture that evolves in the system through several kinds of practices, beliefs and value systems (Sherman, 1978). The sub-culture of the Indian police was assiduously built by the British for the purpose of establishing their Raj[1]. The police were meant to suppress any dissent against the British rule, a situation that gave unlimited power to the police officers. Consequently, corruption became endemic and rampant in the police department. Unfortunately, after independence the system has not been reformed and police culture and organizational practices remain unchanged. During the British period, accountability of the rulers to the citizens was naturally not a question since the country was under the colonial rule. Post-independent India is democratic and the power to change the government lies with the people. Nevertheless, the old system continues and the police are still not accountable to the citizens (Baxi, 1980). There is little change in its functioning and corruption has continued to grow and take new roots.

This paper argues that the extensive police corruption in India is embedded in the culture and organizational norms that have encouraged and sustained venal practices. As Crank (1998, p. 4) suggests "...the behavior of the police only makes sense when viewed through the lens of culture", the emphasis of this paper is to present the cultural roots of corruption in Indian police. First, I will describe the common forms of corruption both at the lower and senior levels of the police department. Secondly, based upon my experiences, I will briefly describe the organizational practices that encourage corruption and trace their origin to the British period. I illustrate how the colonial mentality and practices were deliberately introduced to maintain distance from the people and how these encouraged mercenary practices amongst the subordinate police officers. Finally, I argue that this pervasive corruption is continuing since the present police leadership has adopted and followed the organizational culture introduced

more than 100 years ago. The paper suggests that such corrupt practices can be controlled only through a cultural transformation within the police organization.

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Culture applied to organization

“Culture [is] a confluence of themes of organizational activities” (Crank, 1998, p. 14). In turn it is generally accepted that an organization’s performance is affected by the prevailing culture within its corporate body (Siehl and Martin, 1990). However, culture itself means different things to different people (Sackman, 1991, p. 8). “The notion of cultural organization is rooted in both anthropology and sociology” (Maanen and Barley, 1985, p. 32). While anthropologists describe culture in terms of rites, habits, customs, rituals, material artifacts and behavioral patterns (Freeman, 1970; Hatch, 1973; Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952; Langness, 1979; Tylor, 1958), sociologists focus on subgroups where culture is seen as an association of ideas, values and actions (Becker, 1982; Garfinkle, 1967; Kruse, 1975; Lipp, 1979). In fact, there are a multitude of descriptions of culture and varied meanings in which the term is used in the social sciences. Study of culture has become an area of inquiry for social psychologists and those in the field of management and organizational studies too. Research of cultural practices and its importance to the organizational functions have used different anthropological and sociological concepts selectively depending upon the researcher’s viewpoints (Frost *et al.*, 1985; Martin, 1992; Pedersen and Sorensen, 1989). In general, anthropological studies conceive of organizations as cultural settings examining the human affairs within the body. Socially based research focus largely upon behavior and its functionality within the organizations. Yet, “empirically based knowledge about culture in organizational setting is rather scarce and spotty” (Sackman, 1991, p. 1). What constitutes the culture of an organization remains debatable and its descriptions extend from the “way things are done here” (Schein, 1984; Tunstall, 1983) to interpersonal encounters, stories, myths and legends (Martin, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Wilkins, 1978), dress codes, rituals and ceremonies (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Rosen, 1991), and even gossip, jokes and humor (Abolafia, 1989; Bartunek and Moch, 1991; Rosnow and Fine, 1976; Vinton, 1983).

In the absence of any unanimity about the definition of culture there is no standard method to collect “facts” that may illustrate this cultural setting. Most studies suggest an ethnographical input (Leiter, 1980; Van Maanen, 1979) or to understand the organization phenomenologically (Heidegger, 1977). For many, unstructured interviews with key personnel or the use of self-administered survey questionnaires are useful techniques (Gregory, 1983; Martin *et al.*, 1983; Sackman, 1990; Schein, 1984). Organizational culture has also been studied through a description of the office layouts and decorations (Seagrave, 1995; Turner, 1967). However, reliance upon any one method is likely to admit the possibility of failure to capture the essence of the organizational way of life (Pettigrew, 1979). There are several other problems too with all these methods

being used separately or conjointly. The inability of the researcher to penetrate the organization, to select the key personnel correctly, to ask the appropriate questions and to pick out the significant physical descriptors from the mass of all kinds of objects is a real threat (Bryman, 1988). These studies are also difficult to do since cultural knowledge is taken for granted by its carriers who use it habitually in everyday interactions (Sackman, 1991, p. 180). Organizational culture may be intuitively understood and covertly practiced than in any easy to spot manner.

Even if such obstacles could be overcome, the difficulty in obtaining cooperation, especially from organizations that are secretive and defensive about their activities remains insurmountable (Martin, 1992, p. 66). In organizations like the financial institutions, political parties, private clubs, the military and the police, the only way to gain an in-depth understanding of the prevailing organizational culture is from those "insiders" who have worked in different capacities for sufficiently long periods of time to describe and explain the genesis of the culture (Evered and Louis, 1981). Such personal accounts have their limitations, for these could be construed to be biased or subjective (Sackman, 1991, p. 183) and even suspect since the narrator may have an axe to grind. Authors also charge that insider accounts "...mindlessly ignore the deeper complexities of the craft of policing and the paradoxes and ironies that mark the role of the police" (Crank, 1998). Nevertheless, such accounts still remain the best source to learn significantly about any organization and in one sense the object of any cultural study is to seek an insider's viewpoint (Bryman, 1988).

Although, there is a growing literature about Indian police (Gautam, 1993; Ghosh, 1988; Krishnamurthy, 1996; Mitra and Mohanty, 1992; Natarajan, 1996; Raghavan, 1989; Shah, 1992; Subramanian, 1992; Verma, 1997a, 1997b, 1998) there is virtually no empirical research about its organizational culture. The literature describing the organizational practices, belief systems, prevailing norms and values within the Indian police is very limited[2]. Some understanding of the organizational practices and norms is available from the memoirs published by former police officers (Griffiths, 1971; Lobo, 1992; Singh, 1996) and through some journalistic accounts (Balagopal *et al.*, 1982). However, these could hardly be classified as a scholarly examination of the organizational culture within the Indian police. Due to this lack of research on the police culture in India, this paper is based upon my own perceptions and understanding of the Indian police. As a member of the Indian Police Service (IPS), I have served for more than 12 years in the rank of superintendent in the province of Bihar and have an intimate knowledge of its organizational practices. My initial training at the National Police Academy at Hyderabad (where all the IPS officers of the country are trained together), my interactions with other police officers during the course of my long association have provided a deep understanding of the organizational culture of the Indian police. I use these experiences and personal observations to provide examples of the common practices mentioned in this paper. Although I have largely

served in the state of Bihar these police practices are seen in every other state. The police structure, penal and procedural laws and the managerial pool (the IPS officers) are uniform across the country. My comments may be construed to be subjective, biased and obviously personal accounts have their limitations. Nevertheless, in the absence of any other source of information these observations merit consideration and perhaps could contribute to a better understanding of the nature of Indian police and its shortcomings.

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Corrupt practices in the Indian police

The police in India have an unsavory reputation for extortion and at present, corruption is perhaps even more wide spread and brazen than ever before. Every rank, from the lowest “chowkidar”, the village watchman to the highest ranking director general of police is known to have tainted hands (*Times of India*, 1997a). The middle ranking officers, junior inspectors and inspectors who do most of the investigation work, prey upon the common people by misusing their powers to extort money from the complainants, witnesses and naturally the accused. The constabulary extorts money from hawkers, footpath dwellers (Anandan, 1997; *Indian Express*, 1997), truck and bus drivers and claims a share from the collective earnings made by the police station staff. The IPS officers who occupy all the senior ranks from superintendent onwards still enjoy considerable reputation in the country. However, corruption within their ranks is now commonly accepted and increasing from year to year. IPS officers make money from the transfer and postings of subordinate officers, take bribes and give favors (*Indian Express*, 1999). They demand cuts from vendors supplying uniforms, office equipment and vehicles to the department; even extort from the business houses and subvert investigation of cases on pecuniary or political considerations (Kumar, 1996). Corrupt practices are now part of the Indian police system and are found in every department, in every rank and in every police institution including training colleges. The malaise has spread all over the country and in every aspect of policing.

The police station in-charge called the Station House Officer (SHO) is the most coveted and lucrative office in the department. The SHO enjoys a large measure of autonomy, is the “gatekeeper” for registering criminal cases, controls most of the criminal investigations and makes the decision to arrest suspects. These powers are enshrined in Sections 154-158 of the Criminal Procedure Code and have enabled the officers to indulge in extortion and many other forms of corruption. Ghosh (1978, p. 158-59), who was a retired inspector general of police described the collection of “hafta” or weekly payments from shopkeepers, hawkers, businesses and of course from the criminal operators within the police station areas as perhaps the most pervasive form of police extortion in India. It is therefore not surprising that postings as SHOs of those police stations that have large markets, trade centers, industries or transport junctions are greatly in demand (Anandan, 1997). It is believed that even a few months of such postings enable the officers to earn much more than what they could receive in salaries for their entire service. In fact, postings at police

stations in Delhi's Chandani Chowk, Bombay's Jewelry Bazaar or Calcutta's New Market that are large business centers are directly "controlled" by the chief of police. Reportedly, these postings are at the behest of ministers in charge of police departments since even the daily extortions from these markets runs into hundreds of thousands of rupees[3], money that allegedly gets "shared" right to the top. Similarly, police stations situated in coal field areas, near large industrial complexes, on highways and border check posts are equally notorious. Such postings are a major source of remuneration for the senior officers too including the chiefs of police who make the decision to post the officers-in-charge of these stations.

Investigation of cases, decisions to arrest a suspect, submit a charge-sheet or close some pending investigation are all processes that are generally influenced by pecuniary considerations. Money is extorted from the citizens in a variety of ways. In the absence of a telephonic system like the 911, citizens have to go to the police stations to register their complaints about criminal incidents. It is usual for the SHO or his officers to demand money to register any citizen complaint and if someone is to be named as a suspect then the charge is naturally more. Furthermore, the complainant has not only to pay for instituting a complaint but also to bear the costs of "entertaining" the officers who come for inquiries. The complainant also ends up paying for the investigative "expenses", especially transport as the department provides few vehicles to the investigating officers. Subsequent inquiries, arrest of the offender(s), prosecution in the courts are of course additional costs that the complainant has to bear if he/she is interested in pursuing the matter (Nanda, 1997).

It is not as if there are no rules and procedures for supervising the functions of the investigating officers. Departmental rules require the supervisory officers to visit the place of incident and control investigation at every stage (*Bihar Police Manual*, 1980). However, under the law the collection and collation of all the evidence, preparation of the case diaries and recording of the statement of the witnesses are the responsibilities of the subordinate investigating officers (Mitra, 1960). The Indian police departments are also large and typically a superintendent will have jurisdiction over 200 or more investigators. This implies that the superior officers are able to exert control over at best a few prominent cases leaving effective control over most of the cases to the investigating officers. A serious lack of forensic assistance, poor training and dearth of facilities for collecting and preserving physical evidence have implied that most evidence is in the form of witness statements. These problems of supervision and proper collection of evidence have led to several malpractices within the organization. A common practice is not to register cases and keep the official figures down (Saxena, 1987; Verma, 1993). Furthermore, the decision to send any case for trial is also that of the superintendent and prosecutors have little control over the cases sent for trial. This is a colonial legacy where most senior officers were British while the prosecutors were Indian lawyers appointed by the state. Consequently, police

officers controlled the decisions to send cases for trial. The status of the IPS officers remains similarly much higher than the prosecutors. Thus, even at present, prosecutors are in no position to criticize the decision of the superintendent (GOI, 1980).

The ultimate result is that even without sufficient evidence cases are sent for trial to enhance the police clearance rates. It is no wonder that the proportion of convictions in cases in which trials were completed in 1996 was a dismal 6.02 per cent (NCRB, 1998, p. 222). There is no departmental practice of evaluating the performance of the investigators in terms of the cases investigated, cleared and prosecuted. The manual system of maintaining records also has made it impossible to do any kind of performance appraisal (Verma, 1993). These practices have made the position of the SHOs very powerful in the department and most of the superintendents are unable to keep effective control over their actions. It is therefore not surprising that those who are concerned about the fate of their complaint usually continue courting the investigating officers. The lack of any organizational changes and accountability has implied that corruption continues to grow amongst the investigators.

Apart from taking bribes in investigations, the Indian police personnel are also notorious extortionists. Their power to institute criminal cases and arrest anyone on mere suspicion enables them to extort money from businesses. A few examples will illustrate this point. A notorious form of corrupt practice is to check the drivers for their licenses and vehicle registrations (Sajeesh, 1997). Now, the bureaucratic red-tapism involved in purchasing vehicle registrations and driver licenses is immense. Lack of computerization of records has made the process extremely slow and awkward. It takes a couple of days to get the official papers which also involves high costs. On the other hand, the penal fine is low and the problems of enforcement on crowded Indian roads creates easy opportunities to evade checking by the police. Furthermore, for any citizen the problem of going to the courts to settle the matter is a time consuming and costly process that makes them wary of confronting the police. All these factors have forced most citizens to operate their vehicles without registration and proper licenses and bribe their way out. Thus, the police power to check the vehicles plying on the roads have become a lucrative form of extortion.

The system of registration of the vehicles and obtaining special permits to cross the borders of the states is another bureaucratic nightmare. Every state has imposed tariffs upon the goods being brought in from other states and these are collected at border check points. The tax collectors have powers to inspect the trucks, compound the offense and impose fines or send the matter to the courts for prosecution. Again these are operations that cause delay and a great deal of harassment to the truck companies. Moreover, it is also lucrative to "smuggle" goods across the state boundaries to avoid sales tax and other levies. A system has therefore been created where it is cheaper and convenient to pay the police rather than attempt to operate honestly and pursue the case in

the courts. Thus, all border check posts are dens of corruption in which the police plays a major part since all enforcement is done through officers posted at these border crossings (Sajeesh, 1997).

Similarly, extortion from bus owners is also a common practice. The socialist form of economy has led to the creation of a state monopoly on most of the highways. On most major road arteries only the state transport corporations are allowed to run its buses. The private bus operators are given licenses to ply buses on shorter and non-economic traffic routes. However, the state transport system is poorly managed and is unable to meet the demands of the large number of commuters. This encourages the private sector operators to divert their buses on these routes without having a permit. The business is attractive despite the risk of being caught. Thus, a large number of buses ply without permit on these routes and get away by bribing the police who check occasionally. For the police enforcement officers all these are well-paying situations with large returns. The traffic department is thus a coveted posting for any police officer and bribery or patronage is employed within the department to get a transfer to this section.

Managerial corruption

Amongst the senior ranks most of the corruption comes from the administrative power associated with the management of the organization. The police managers are the leaders entrusted to develop control mechanisms to prevent and or reduce subordinate corruption and misconduct (Barker and Carter, 1994; Roberg and Kuykendall, 1990). In the Indian police system all the managers come from a common pool of the Indian Police Service (see Bayley, 1969). The personnel are selected from an all India examination and after a year of common training at the national police academy, they are then allotted to a state cadre. They are given a lateral entry into the higher echelons of the service and after a field exposure of around two to three years, they are posted as superintendents of police, in charge of a district with 800-1,000 police personnel to command. Their service is designated as an All India Service and although for most of their careers they serve the state government yet they are federal government officers controlled by the home ministry from New Delhi. Occasionally they are sent on deputation to different organizations of the central government also.

These IPS officers are the heir of the Indian Police (IP) that similarly managed the police during the British period. Considerable prestige and status has been attached to this cadre and the administration of the police in the country remains in their hands. However, corruption and misconduct within these ranks has also become common in the last two-three decades. The opportunities for corruption are many for the senior ranks. Since the posting and transfer of subordinate officers, including the SHOs is controlled by the superintendents and above ranks it is easy for them to post their own "trusted" officers who extort and share the spoils with them. Since this power also extends for disciplinary purposes, the IPS officers are also in a position to

threaten the subordinates and thereby receive a cut from the collections made at the police station levels. Another opportunity lies in receiving bribes from vendors supplying the large numbers of items, from vehicles to uniforms, guns and other paraphernalia to the police organization (*Times of India*, 1996). The police departments have large budgets and the purchases that are made annually involve huge sums of money. On an average the police in Bihar get to spend anywhere from 10-20 million US dollars on equipments (NCRB, 1998) and even a small percentage in the form of a bribe is a lucrative sum. At present, 17 senior IPS officers in Bihar state are being prosecuted by the Central Bureau of Investigation for making these illegal purchases (Kumar, 1996). An officer in Delhi is being prosecuted for converting a public park into a private garden (*Times of India*, 1997b).

Another visible form of corrupt practice common amongst almost all the senior officers is their lavish life style maintained from official expenses. The officers are provided large government accommodations that are “decorated” from official funds diverted from many sources. Senior police officers keep police constables as orderlies, enjoy personal guards, official cars for 24 hour usage and many other privileges. Not only the officers but their family members and friends too share these advantages. These are all seen as “perks” that go with the office although there is no official sanction for them. The corrupt practices described here have a long historical antecedent. The SHO had gained notoriety during the British period itself. Extortion from shopkeepers and businesses were common practices. The burden of entertaining visiting police officers always fell upon the local subordinates and police constables served as orderlies to senior officers – a cultural tradition from the British period. The lavish life style amongst the police leadership has evolved from the system promoted by the colonial policies and administrative ethos of the British rulers and is one which continues today.

Raj and the Indian police

The British Raj was glory and rule of unquestioned authority in which the police played a major role in the subjugation of the people. The British Indian police service was deliberately made into a ruler’s force with little provision for citizen accountability (Das and Verma, 1998). The objective to rule the large country was achieved through a police force that was cheap to operate, brutal and exploitative of the people and totally unaccountable to the citizens (Gupta, 1979). Moreover, the British Raj in India was “glamour, snobbery and the basis of imperial economy” and “was the principal signpost of Britain’s sunlit empire” (Chakravarty, 1989, p. 231). The Raj, lauded eloquently by writers such as Kipling, Charles Allen, Philip Woodruff and others was a life style for the British rulers that was more extravagant than the Romans. The “sahibs” and “mehsahibs” lived in sprawling “bungalows” and had a retinue of servants for every need: “Khansama” (chef) to cook their meals and “Aayahs” (maids) to look after their children (Woodruff, 1954). Summers were spent at the hill stations to escape the heat and dust of their burden while the winters were meant for tiger

hunts, cricket and entertainment by the exotic Maharajahs. Since the Raj itself was established upon the strength and terror of the police administration, it was natural that the police organization too would reflect the glories of the Raj (Verma, 1999). The British built few hospitals and schools but the police stations and buildings were of the bungalow style, imposing structures in Victorian architecture, with high ceilings to trap the hot air and broad verandah running all around where most of the official work was done (Metcalf, 1994, pp. 177-79). Most police stations also had a large compound with curving path to the gate manned by an armed sentry, a structure to keep the people in awe and at a distance. The culture within the organization of course was assiduously built to convey this impression and ensure that the subjects never dared to look into the eyes of their rulers. The police were vested with so much power that the lowest functionaries, though illiterates and barely paid any salary, still had powers to arrest and detain any person for 24 hours (Gupta, 1979). The imperative need was to develop a sense of fear of authority in the entire population and the police department served this need. The organizational ethos, the style of administration and its purposeful alienation from the people all contributed towards corrupt practices within the police. Despite frequent and wide spread charges of corruption against the station house officer (Arnold, 1986), the British never made any serious attempt to reform the system (Gupta, 1979).

Thus, free meals, drinks, supplies, entertainment, free transport and special treatment, could be extorted from the subjugated people without much opposition (Gupta, 1979). These were seen as common perks for the police personnel and generally the British remained indifferent to the public complaints against the police (Gurr, *et al.*, 1977). Though, British officers projected an image of the “guardian”, the “mai-baap”, literally mother and father of the people (Woodruff, 1954) their role never ventured beyond inconsequential actions. They pretended to keep the plundering station house officer under control but they never went beyond mere symbolism (Peers, 1991). The British of course would not give power to people to keep control directly since that would have made their Raj redundant.

Moreover, the British officers purposely created an aura of grandeur for their own superior ranks and functioned no differently from the extortionist subordinates. “The British not only borrowed the structure but also took over the feeling tone of the Mughal administration – a mixture of great pomp and show...” (Cohn, 1961, p. 8). Ostentatious pageantry and grandeur of the senior officers was an obvious, visible form of authority. The morning parade and salute to the commanding officer, the armed sentry at the superintendent’s gate and armed escort on their tours were symbols that placed the officers on a high pedestal. This style of governance created a cultural setting in which the administrators were way above those being ruled and this distance was deliberately maintained. There was no way in which any citizen could dare to approach the senior officer thereby leaving no avenue of complaint against the corrupt subordinates. The tiger hunts and lavish entertainment were adjunct

parts of this myth, one that further institutionalized corruption within the ranks. These entertainments were made part of the organizational practices in which the officers on tours would combine business with sports and pleasure. It was usual for the British officers to combine inspection of the police station with a tiger hunt and the subordinate officers not only had to get the records updated for inspection but also to arrange food and shelter for the large number of members of the hunting party (Rao, 1993).

The Raj itself was symbolic, based upon an implied authority and total submission of the people. The slightest challenge to any official decree was taken seriously (Heehs, 1993) since it was felt that control would be impossible unless the people were totally restrained. In this system, the people felt the power of the Raj through the daily humiliations and abuse meted out by the police personnel and submitted meekly to their extortion and corrupt practices (Yang, 1985). The SHO was deliberately allowed to be a big, powerful authority, one to whom the people had to curry favors. The implications were clear, if the SHO was a more powerful man than the superintendent "Sahib" (literally lord), he was infinitely bigger since the SHO was subservient to him. The subordinate officers were encouraged to assert their authority and perhaps their extortions were seen as a way to subdue the people. "The [British] police was so shaped in personnel, powers and procedures as to be a terror to the law abiding citizen" (Gupta, 1979, p. 74).

Police Raj in present day India

In present day India, tiger hunts have naturally been banned but the Raj lives on. The system that was superimposed by the British in 1861 continues without any major transformation (Verma, 1998) and the police in independent India is still governed and regulated by the Police Act of 1861. The Indian Penal Code defining the nature of crime, the Evidence Act and the Code of Criminal Procedure that guide police actions are applicable to the whole of India (except the state of Jammu and Kashmir where it goes by another name), have remained unchanged from the British period (Mitra, 1960). The rank structure, departmental rules and regulations, recruitment and training systems, which are similar across all the provinces share similar historical influences. The norms prevailing 100 years ago when the British administered the organization are still dominant everywhere. There is little change in the role, functions and behavior of the police after independence and old traditions, and even the record keeping systems have remained intact (Verma, 1999). A British police officer of the nineteenth century will still feel at home in any Indian police department of the approaching twenty-first century. Accordingly, police behavior has also not undergone any transformation despite the independence and establishment of a democratic society. Police misbehave and terrorize the citizens as if the Raj still continues.

The principles guiding the police system of administration remain the same. The same traditions of grandeur for the senior officers and unaccountability to the people continues (Seminar, 1977). Consequently, the lavish life style of the

senior officers is still quite visible. Instead of tiger hunts there are new year parties, picnics and official “get togethers” with family and friends, at “Dak Bungalows” (government rest houses). The entertainment of senior officers by the subordinate staff is even now an established practice in the police departments and beyond a token payment all other expenses are passed down to the SHOs.

After independence, the police are no longer required to display pomp and glory of the rulers but traditions die hard and the practice of glorifying the senior officers still survives. In many provinces like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, senior officers are still addressed as “Huzur Bahadur”, the brave gentleman, or “Kaptan Sahib”, the lordly captain, titles used during the British period. Personal drivers, body guards, even armed guards for the residence and family are common appendages for senior police officers.

The association and continuance of the British legacy is displayed with pride. Most police offices maintain a “succession list” (names and tenure of officers from the past) coming down from the British to the present period. The police stations and other offices still function from the same bungalow type buildings while the palatial mansions built for British officers now house the present senior officers. Implications of these continuing cultural traits are clear: the police system of independent India is no different from the old police system and the IPS are the inheritors of the baton passed down by their British predecessors. The wide gulf between the “rulers” and the ruled continues and the class hierarchy even within the force, is strictly maintained.

The élitist nature of the senior ranks is visible not only in the common forms of greetings, where subordinates salute and come to attention before senior officers, but also in their interactions. Constables and even middle level officers do not sit down in front of the superintendent. IPS officers still employ constables as personal orderlies who serve as servants of the officer. It is not uncommon for police station personnel to take care of the comforts of the senior officers. Thus, official vehicles, telephones and staff are used for personal purposes, subordinate officers escort the children to school or the spouse for shopping and making social visits. It is a common sight in India to find a police officer’s family being accompanied by police personnel or even armed guards and this hardly raises any questions. In several places it is not uncommon to find a large number of police personnel engaged at the farms and personal establishments of the senior officers. In Bihar, a director general had almost a 100 police personnel tending his large garden and orchards!

Similarly, subordinate officers are routinely utilized for making purchases, for making arrangements during private parties and functions, for obtaining special tickets during major sports or cultural events and even for getting railway or airline tickets. The usual pretext is that most of these jobs require standing in queues that would reduce the “dignity” of the superior officers and “weaken” their authority. India is unashamedly an élitist society (Sen, 1986) but élitism within the superior bureaucratic services is scandalous. Such blatant

misuse of official resources and other corrupt practices, in the name of cultural traditions are rarely commented adversely or even considered deviant since these have been going on for a very long time.

The final outcome of these practices is a quiet acceptance of the corruption within the subordinate ranks. The IPS officers, who themselves misuse public funds and demand services from the subordinates are unwilling and unable to provide any control over the mercenary actions of their subordinates. They have little legitimacy and moral strength to take firm action against the extortions indulged by their officers. Most actively share the booty while a small minority remains at best passive and indifferent towards these corrupt practices.

Conclusion

The élitist nature of the police leadership, the politicization of the department, the unaccountability to the people and outdated management practices have all combined to make corruption endemic and even acceptable within the organization. The persistence of open corrupt practices by officers is clearly indicative that the organization itself has become deviant. In a culture where pomp and show of senior officers is maintained through expenses borne by the subordinate officers, it is not surprising that regular extortions in every police station are not enquired about nor frowned upon by the senior ranks. It is therefore not surprising that the station house officer's extortions are common public knowledge and the traffic constable dares to collect money from truck drivers in front of everyone (*India Today*, 1998). It is in fact a pointer that the whole government system has become diseased. Organizational culture determines the level of honesty and integrity of its officers. The role and function of any police department is adversely affected if the prevailing norms and traditional ways of doing things encourage corrupt practices. Accordingly, the way to control corruption and reform the system is to make changes in the way things are being done. This calls for a major transformation, of organizational structure, management practices, supervision procedures, decentralization of power, creation of local accountability system, even a change in role and functions of the police in the society. There is little dispute that corruption within the Indian police can only be controlled by making changes in the manner policing is being done. The more intriguing question is the process that could bring about this transformation.

Notes

1. *Literally* rule – the term symbolizes absolute hegemony and association of grandeur and will be used in this sense.
2. Even a special issue on bureaucratic culture by *Indian Journal of Public Administration* (1982) paid scant attention to police culture in the country.
3. 1\$(US) = 40 Indian rupees.

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