

NOTE

Policing and Human Rights

A Correspondent writes :

GIVEN THE PREVAILING police culture in the country, it makes little sense to ask policemen to learn basics about human rights. In truth most of them think Human Rights Commission and Human Rights Bodies by continually raising issues of human rights violations, at times, tend to obstruct them in their duty. Yet the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) periodically addresses the select gathering comprising policemen and police officers with a view to improving the human rights situation. On June 8, 2011 NHRC, organised, for the first time, an interactive session with a group of Delhi Police Officers and its present and former group of interns of Human Rights Training Programme. One Arya Priya, a former NHRC intern even presented a paper on “The Human Rights and Police” which reportedly triggered the session. As the seminar was Delhi-based the forceful eviction of Ram Dev’s volunteers in the middle of night on the 4-5th June, 2011 from the Ramlila Ground in New Delhi got prominence in the discourse. Also, several participants discussed the methods of policing and increased violation of human rights by policemen throughout the country. The seminar expressed the unanimous view that “The Police Officers need to be more sensitive towards the people approaching them for registering their complaints”. It’s simply unthinkable for the socially and economically disadvantaged to get their complaints recorded at police stations unless there is some political interference. Law is for the rich. And policemen are there to serve the rich. Police and paramilitary have their own way of functioning in total disregard of democratic values and norms. They are licensed killers while maintaining the facade of apparent neutrality. Irrespective of the orders from the senior officers, sometimes they use their own discretion in tackling the situation on the ground. In other words they are immune to law even if they violate it. True, they are themselves entitled to human rights like any other citizen but being the habitual violators of human rights they cannot ensure their own rights even in an abnormal situation.

No doubt NHRC and its state-level affiliates are becoming increasingly popular as the last resort for the victims of police atrocities but so far their role is basically limited. In the absence of awareness of the people about their rights, by and large, commission’s efforts to champion the cause of rights issue are yet to address the problem in its entirety. Again this seminar-oriented culture of human rights championing is urban-centric, it doesn’t reach the vast rural masses who frequently face human rights abuses from the powers that be.

If NHRC takes suo motu cognizance in some cases of gross human rights violations, it is because human rights groups despite their limited strength and influence are today recognised by the civil society as the voice of the voiceless. It is easy to urge police officials not to do investigation under any kind of pressure or bias but in reality police personnel always work under the diktats of the persons in power. And as a result the victims invariably suffer. The very system of police training is aimed at raising a brute force to be used against the people who refuse to kowtow to the oppressive authority. It is unlikely that NHRC’s suggestions to give the police force a humane face would go beyond the seminar hall. □□□