
PRINCIPLES AND FUNCTIONS OF POLICING, DUTIES OF CIVIL POLICE AND RURAL POLICING IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Policing in India has undergone a long and complex historical evolution, beginning with indigenous systems of community-led vigilance such as village watchmen, *graminis*, *kotwals*, and locally embedded dispute-resolution mechanisms rooted in customary practices. These decentralized, community-oriented models gradually gave way to more structured and centralized policing frameworks during the medieval and Mughal periods. The most significant transformation, however, occurred under British colonial rule with the enactment of the **Police Act of 1861**, which established a highly hierarchical, uniform, and command-driven police system designed primarily to maintain political control rather than to serve public welfare. This colonial legacy continues to shape contemporary policing structures, administrative hierarchies, and operational methods across India.

This research article undertakes a comprehensive examination of the **principles and functions of policing**, the **statutory and operational duties of civil police personnel**, and the **distinctive challenges associated with rural policing**, where nearly two-thirds of India's population resides. The paper analyses the structural, functional, and operational dimensions of policing by drawing upon historical developments, statutory frameworks, committee recommendations, and current policing practices. It also identifies persistent systemic issues such as inadequate resources, political interference, outdated laws, limited accountability mechanisms, and sociocultural complexities that continue to constrain the effectiveness of the policing system.

Furthermore, the study integrates landmark judicial decisions, including **Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)**, which laid the foundation for modern police reforms; **DK Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997)**, which established crucial guidelines to prevent custodial violence and safeguard human rights; and **Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh (2014)**, which made FIR registration mandatory in cognizable offences. These judgments collectively reinforce the principles of constitutional accountability, rule of law, transparency, and citizen-centric policing. By synthesizing jurisprudence, theoretical frameworks, and empirical insights, the paper evaluates how these legal directives influence policing practices

and contribute to establishing national standards of professional conduct.

Finally, the paper concludes with a set of comprehensive, reform-oriented recommendations aimed at modernizing the Indian police system, improving community participation, strengthening civil and rural policing structures, integrating technology, enhancing training, and promoting transparency and accountability. These reforms are essential for transitioning the Indian police from a colonial command-and-control model to a modern, democratic, service-oriented institution that upholds constitutional values, protects citizens' rights, and effectively meets the security and justice needs of a rapidly evolving society.

Keywords: Policing in India, Civil Police, Rural Policing, Police Reforms, Law and Order, National Police Commission, Police Duties, Police Principles, Criminal Justice System, Model Police Act.

Chapter I

Research Questions

1. What are the core principles that govern policing in India?
2. What are the statutory and operational functions assigned to civil police at various levels?
3. How has the police system evolved historically, particularly with reference to indigenous, Mughal, British, and post-Independence structures?
4. What are the unique challenges and characteristics of rural policing in India?
5. Which major reforms, judicial directives, and recommendations aim to improve policing standards?
6. What gaps and structural deficiencies continue to weaken policing effectiveness?
7. What reforms and policy changes are necessary to modernize and democratize policing?

Research Gap

Existing literature on Indian policing focuses primarily on legal frameworks,

administrative structures, or functional duties of police officers. However, there is a notable gap in integrated studies that combine historical evolution, principles of policing, duties of civil police, rural policing challenges, and analysis of judicial interventions in a single comprehensive framework. Additionally, rural policing, despite covering nearly 65% of India's population remains under-researched, with limited academic attention on the structural and logistical challenges faced by village-level police units. This research paper bridges these gaps by synthesizing diverse sources, historical perspectives, statutory provisions, and judicial precedents.

Chapter II

Introduction

A society can progress only when its people live with peace of mind, supported by conducive social conditions, and enjoy a continuous sense of safety, security, and public order. Stability is the foundation of development without it, economic activity declines, social cooperation weakens, and governance becomes difficult. In this context, the police occupy a central position as the most visible and accessible arm of the State, entrusted with the responsibility of **maintaining public order, enforcing the rule of law, preventing crime, and safeguarding the rights and liberties of citizens.**

In India, the legal and administrative framework of policing continues to be largely shaped by the **Police Act of 1861**, a colonial legislation enacted in the aftermath of the **1857 revolt**. This Act established a centralized, hierarchical, and command-driven police structure primarily designed to serve colonial interests rather than democratic ideals. Its influence persists even today, defining the organizational hierarchy, disciplinary processes, recruitment standards, and operational practices of modern police forces across many states.

Despite India's transformation into an **independent democratic republic**, the policing system has undergone only gradual and partial reforms. While society has experienced immense technological, economic, and sociocultural changes including rapid urbanization, digital communication, increasing population density, and complex forms of crime the police structure remains bound to outdated legal frameworks, inadequate infrastructure, manpower shortages, politicized control, and restricted institutional autonomy. These structural constraints limit the ability of police forces to effectively respond to contemporary challenges

such as cybercrime, terrorism, organized crime, gender-based violence, and inter-community conflicts.

This study, therefore, undertakes a detailed examination of the principles governing policing, the statutory and functional duties of civil police personnel, and the specialized challenges associated with rural policing in India, where the majority of the population continues to reside. Rural policing presents unique complexities spatial dispersion, limited resources, caste-based conflicts, land disputes, inadequate training, and weak communication systems all of which demand context-specific policing strategies. By analysing these aspects, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and shortcomings of the current policing system and the reforms required to make it more democratic, accountable, and citizen-centric.

Chapter III

Definition of Police

The word police come from the Latin word '**politia**' which simply means **condition of a state**. India being a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, with different ethics and a huge population cannot stick to the age-old systems as the society keeps changing on from time to time so should the policing methods and philosophies.

1. Definition under the **Police Act, 1861**

It is the primary legislation governing police forces in most Indian states. **Section 1** of the Police Act, 1861 defines "**Police**" as:

"The entire police-establishment under this Act shall be deemed to be one police-force, and shall be formally enrolled."

2. Definition under the **Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC)**

Section 2(s) CrPC defines "**Police Station**":

"A police station means any post or place declared generally or specially by the State Government to be a police station." From this, legally, "**police officer**" is one in charge of or subordinate to a police station (SHO, SI, etc.).

3. Definition under the **Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC)**

Section 21 IPC defines “**Public Servants**”, Police officers are included within the category of public servants:

“Every commissioned officer, gazetted officer, and other officer of the military, naval or air forces of India; every officer of the Government whose duty it is to prevent offence is a public servant.”

5. Definition under the **Model Police Act, 2006**

Section 2(1) - “**Police**” means

“The police force constituted under this Act and includes all ranks of police officers appointed under this Act.”

Simply, Police mean a legally constituted, organized force of the State, empowered by law to prevent crime, maintain public order, enforce the law, investigate offences, and protect life and property.

Chapter IV

Legal frameworks governing the Police Administration

The Indian police system functions within a structured legal framework derived primarily from the Constitution of India, the Police Act, 1861, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC), and State Police Acts.

The **Constitution** places “police” and “public order” under the **State List**, giving each state the authority to organize and administer its police force while requiring all policing activities to follow constitutional guarantees such as equality before law, personal liberty, and procedural fairness.

The **Police Act, 1861** is the foundational law that created a uniform, organized police force across the country. It outlines the structure, hierarchy, recruitment, powers, duties, and disciplinary control of the police. Many states still follow this Act, while some have enacted their own modern police legislation based on its framework.

The CrPC, 1973 forms the core procedural law regulating police functions. It governs essential activities such as registration of complaints, investigation of offences, arrest, search and seizure, maintenance of public order, filing of charge sheets, and preventive actions. It ensures that all police operations follow uniform procedures and remain subject to judicial oversight.

Alongside these central laws, **State Police Acts, Police Manuals, Police Standing Orders, and administrative rules** regulate day-to-day functioning, internal discipline, training, service conditions, community policing initiatives, and operational procedures.

Together, these constitutional, statutory, and administrative instruments form the legal foundation of the Indian policing system.

Chapter V

Evolution of Police in India

The evolution of policing in India has unfolded across four major historical phases **Ancient, Medieval, Colonial, and Post-Independence**, each contributing distinct structural, functional, and philosophical elements to the contemporary police system. The trajectory of policing reflects the broader sociopolitical transformations in the subcontinent, moving from community-based mechanisms to a centralized administrative framework, and eventually to a democratic yet still transitional policing apparatus. The policing models of the past continue to influence modern institutions, making an understanding of these phases essential for contextualizing present-day reforms.

1. Policing in Ancient India

Policing in ancient India was largely **community-oriented, decentralized, and rooted in dharma**, emphasizing moral order, social responsibility, and collective security.

During the **Vedic period**, the *Gramani*, or village headman, served as the primary authority responsible for maintaining order, conducting dispute resolution, and collecting intelligence. Early Vedic texts such as the *Rig Veda* and *Atharva Veda* contain references to crime, violence, and social disorder, indicating the presence of organized mechanisms for maintaining public peace.

During the **Harappan or Indus Valley period**, archaeological evidence of fortified settlements, granaries, and town planning suggests the existence of a structured security and surveillance system, although explicit administrative records are absent.

By the **Mauryan period (310 BCE)**, policing became significantly more institutionalized. *Kautilya's Arthashastra* provides one of the earliest detailed treatises on policing, describing the use of spies, secret agents, surveillance systems, and preventive strategies. During this period, officials such as the *Dandapala*, *Durgapala*, and *Antapala* were responsible for military, police, and frontier security functions. The Mauryan system was more centralized in nature, emphasizing intelligence gathering and strict enforcement of law.

In the **Gupta period**, the system became comparatively more decentralized. The **Greek ambassador Megasthenes** and the **Chinese traveller Fa-Hien** documented Indian policing practices, noting the presence of officials like the *Dandikas*, who served as high-ranking law-and-order officers. This era reflects a shift back toward local autonomy and greater reliance on community institutions for conflict resolution and crime prevention.

2. Policing under Medieval India

The medieval period saw significant transformations with the arrival of Islamic rule. During the **Delhi Sultanate**, policing was deeply influenced by **Islamic law (Sharia)** and the administrative structures of the sultans. The Sultan acted as the supreme authority for justice, and punishments during this period were often swift and harsh, intended to maintain strict social discipline. The *Faujdars* functioned as provincial military-cum-police chiefs, while the *Kotwal* served as a key official in urban areas, simultaneously acting as magistrate, police chief, market regulator, and municipal administrator. At the village level, the *Chaukidar* performed duties of surveillance, reporting, and routine law enforcement. Hindu populations continued to follow **Hindu law**, interpreted by *pandits*, creating a dual system of legal administration.

Under the **Mughal Empire**, policing became more systematized. The administration adopted a multi-tiered system involving *Kotwals*, *Faujdars*, and *Thanadars*, each exercising varying degrees of police, judicial, and military authority. The Kotwal was responsible for urban policing, patrolling, market supervision, and intelligence collection, while the Thanadar oversaw policing in rural regions. Although this system introduced a more structured approach, it remained autocratic and heavily militarized, and depended substantially on local feudal

authorities such as *zamindars*. The Mughal policing model lacked institutional accountability and relied on discretionary authority, contributing to systemic weaknesses.

3. Policing under British India

The British colonial period marked the most significant turning point in the evolution of Indian policing. Following the **Battle of Plassey (1757)** and the consolidation of **Company rule**, the British introduced several codified laws such as the **Indian Penal Code (1860)**, **Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC, 1861)**, and the **Indian Evidence Act (1872)** to formalize criminal justice and governance. Initially, the British retained the Mughal policing framework, making only incremental modifications.

However, the **Revolt of 1857** exposed the inadequacies of the indigenous system and demonstrated to the British the need for a strong, centralized, and loyal police force. Consequently, the **Police Act of 1861** was introduced, establishing a semi-military, hierarchical, and command-driven police structure designed primarily to suppress dissent and protect colonial interests. The Act subordinated the police to the executive authority, particularly the **District Magistrate**, creating an apparatus of control rather than a service-oriented institution.

Key features of the Act included a rigid hierarchical structure led by the **Inspector General of Police (IGP)**, emphasis on strict discipline, the establishment of armed reserve forces, and an operational focus on surveillance, repression, and political control. The legacy of this colonial model continues to influence modern Indian policing, particularly in terms of centralized authority, discipline-oriented functioning, and executive domination.

The **Police Commissions of 1860 and 1902-03** reviewed these structures, but recommended only marginal changes. The **Islington Commission Report (1917)** marked a major development by advocating for the creation of an **Indian Police Service (IPS)**, recognizing the need for a professionalized cadre within the policing system.

The colonial orientation of policing in India has been strongly critiqued in various landmark judicial decisions. In **Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)**¹, the Supreme Court

¹ (2006) 8 SCC 1, AIR 2006 SC 2177, (2006) 4 SCALE 393, (2006) 5 SCR 1

emphasized that the 1861 Act was outdated and inconsistent with democratic constitutional ideals, noting that the continuation of colonial policing structures impeded professional autonomy and accountability. This is the most significant judgment on police reforms in India. The Supreme Court issued **seven binding directives** to ensure autonomy, accountability, professionalism, and insulation from political interference. It emphasized principles of rule of law, impartial policing, fixed tenure, transparent functioning, and the creation of Police Complaints Authorities.

4. Pre-Independence Reforms

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, certain administrative reforms were undertaken under the Company's rule. In **1774**, **Warren Hastings** introduced procedural changes that attempted to streamline policing, while **Sir Charles Napier** implemented reforms in the **Sindh region** emphasizing the separation of police from military functions and establishing an independent police body to support district collectors. However, these reforms were limited in scope and hampered by the British administration's lack of experience with Indian socio-legal systems.

In **1792**, **Governor-General Cornwallis** abolished the **zamindari-based policing system** and introduced the **Thanadari system**, which placed law-and-order responsibilities on government-appointed officials rather than hereditary intermediaries. These initial steps paved the way for the more comprehensive **Police Act of 1861**, which established the foundation of the modern administrative police structure.

5. Post-Independence Policing in India

After Independence in 1947, India retained the organizational framework of the colonial police system. Although the political environment shifted to a democratic structure, policing continued to be governed by the **Police Act of 1861**, leading to persistent challenges of executive control, inadequate accountability, and lack of modernization. In **1949**, **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel**, India's first Union Home Minister emphasized the need for a unified and professional **All India Service**, leading to the formal institutionalization of the **Indian Police Service (IPS)** under **Article 312** of the Constitution.

Several committees and commissions, including the **National Police Commission**

(1977–82), **Ribeiro Committee (1998)**, **Padmanabhaiah Committee (2000)**, and the **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2007)**, extensively critiqued the outdated colonial framework and recommended comprehensive structural reforms. However, implementation has remained weak and fragmented across states.

Cases such as **DK Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997)**² (guidelines on arrest and custody) a landmark case establishing the **human rights principles of policing**, especially the **rights of arrested persons**. The Court laid out specific guidelines to prevent custodial torture, promote transparency, ensure accountability, and uphold dignity, life, and liberty under **Article 21**.

In **Nandini Satpathy v. P.L. Dani (1978)**³, this case expanded the **rights of accused persons** and restricted coercive interrogations. It laid down principles of fair investigation, ethical policing, and respect for human dignity, reinforcing **Article 20(3)** protections.

Also, in **State of Punjab v. Gurmit Singh**⁴, the Supreme Court highlighted the duty of the police to ensure sensitivity, dignity, and protection of victims, emphasizing human rights, professional conduct, and the need for trust-building with citizens.

In **Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh (2014)**⁵ (mandatory FIR registration) further strengthened the vision of accountable and citizen-centric policing. This case strengthened principles of transparency, impartiality, and rule of law by making **registration of FIR mandatory in cognizable offences**. The Court held that police cannot refuse to register an FIR, reinforcing citizens' rights and procedural fairness.

Despite these developments, post-Independence policing remains heavily influenced by the legacy of the colonial model, and reforms have been slow, inconsistent, and often superficial. The persistence of executive control, resource deficiencies, and a punitive organizational culture reflects the enduring imprint of the 1861 Act.

² 1997) 1 SCC 416, AIR 1997 SC 610, (1997) 1 SCR 801

³(1978) 2 SCC 424, AIR 1978 SC 1025, 1978 Cri LJ 968, 1978 SCC (Cri) 236, 1978 SCC OnLine SC 112

⁴(1996) 2 SCC 384, 1996 SCC (Cri) 316, AIR 1996 SC 1393, 1996 Cri LJ 1728, 1996 SCC OnLine SC 47

⁵ (2014) 2 SCC 1, AIR 2014 SC 187, (2013) 14 SCR 593

Chapter VI

Indian Police Act, 1861

The Indian Police Act of 1861 is the **foundational law** that established the modern policing system in India. Enacted after the **Revolt of 1857**, its primary aim was to create a **centralized, militaristic, and highly disciplined police force to maintain colonial control**. The Act structured the police as an instrument of authority, not as a service-oriented body, which is why many of its features continue to influence policing even today.

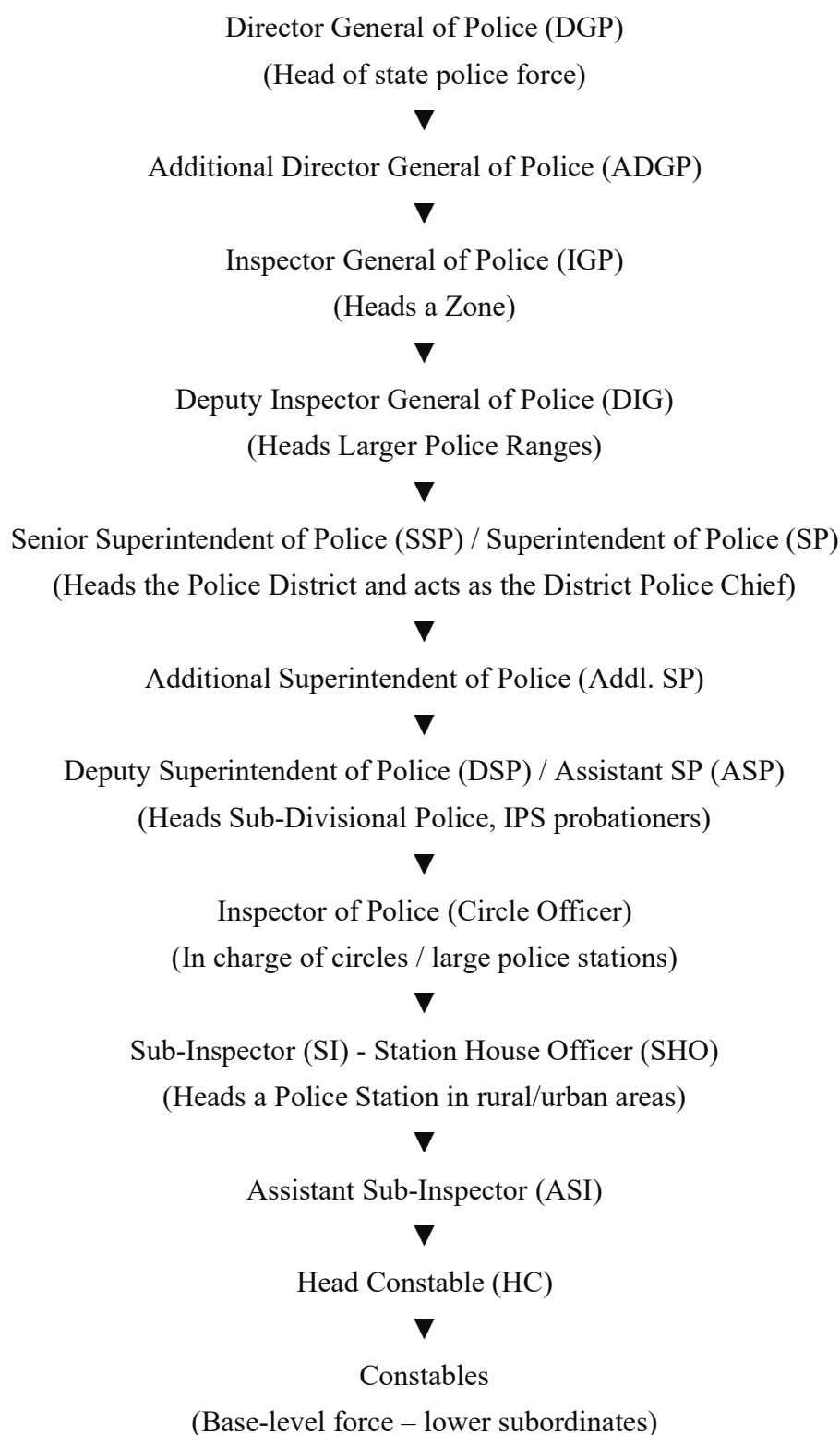
The Act empowered the state to create a hierarchical police force under the overall supervision of the provincial government. It institutionalized the roles of **Inspector-General of Police, District Superintendents, and local officers**, establishing a strict chain of command. The **District Magistrate** was made the chief authority overseeing police operations, embedding heavy bureaucratic control. The Act authorized the police to maintain order, prevent crimes, detect offenses, and enforce regulations, giving them significant powers in areas of arrest, patrol, and public order maintenance.

Section-wise, the Act contains provisions such as **Section 3** (appointment of Inspector-General and District Superintendents), **Section 4** (appointments of subordinates), **Section 7** (disciplinary powers like suspension, dismissal, reduction in rank), **Section 23** (duties of police officers including prevention of offenses, obedience to orders, intelligence gathering), and **Section 30** (power to regulate assemblies and processions). These provisions shaped the framework for policing for more than 160 years.

Despite numerous reforms recommended over the decades, the 1861 Act still governs the police in many Indian states, which explains persistent colonial characteristics such as centralized control, limited accountability, low community engagement, and wide discretionary powers. This has led to strong demands for modernization and replacement of the Act by more democratic, citizen-oriented legislation. The **Model Police Act, 2006** was proposed for this purpose, but its adoption has been uneven across states. Nonetheless, the Police Act of 1861 remains a cornerstone of the Indian policing system, representing both the legacy of colonial governance and the need for contemporary reform.

Chapter VII

Hierarchy of Police and Civil Police Structure



Chapter VIII

Who Are Civil Police?

Civil Police constitute the general duty police force responsible for all **non-specialized policing tasks**. Their duties include **law and order maintenance, crime prevention, investigation, patrolling, traffic regulation, arrest procedures, and public assistance**.

Civil police are distinct from **armed police**, who assist during **riots, VIP protection, or high-risk operations**.

Chapter IX

Principles of Policing

The principles of policing in India are grounded in the constitutional mandate of **maintaining public order, ensuring internal security, and upholding the rule of law**. At the core of Indian policing lies the foundational principle that all police actions must conform to **constitutional safeguards, statutory limits, and democratic values**. This stems from the idea that policing is not merely an exercise of authority, but a **public service** rooted in **legality, fairness, and accountability**.

The **rule of law** forms the bedrock of Indian policing, requiring the police to act strictly within legal boundaries, respect procedural safeguards, and ensure that no individual is subjected to arbitrary action.

Another central principle is **impartiality**, which demands that the police function free from political pressure, religious bias, caste prejudice, or social discrimination. Impartial enforcement of laws reinforces public trust and strengthens the legitimacy of the policing system.

Closely connected to impartiality is the principle of respect for **human rights**, which requires the police to safeguard the dignity, liberty, and privacy of individuals. The Supreme Court's decision in *DK Basu v. State of West Bengal* reaffirmed this principle by mandating humane treatment, transparency in arrest, and preventing custodial violence.

The principle of **accountability** ensures that police officers are answerable for their

decisions, conduct, and use of authority. Accountability mechanisms include internal departmental oversight, judicial review, human rights commissions, and external bodies such as Police Complaints Authorities established under the directives in *Prakash Singh v. Union of India*.

Transparency plays a significant role in reinforcing this accountability, as open and clear procedures in registration of cases, investigation processes, and public communication help cultivate trust between the police and the community. In *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India (1997) - Phone Tapping Case*⁶, the Court emphasised constitutional safeguards, privacy, and transparency in surveillance, establishing checks to ensure that policing respects the right to privacy under **Article 21**.

Modern policing also places importance on **minimal use of force**, wherein police officers are required to employ the least coercive methods necessary for maintaining law and order. This principle aligns with **global standards of democratic policing** and is reflected in the guidelines issued by the Supreme Court in cases relating to arrest and detention. The emphasis on **proportionality and restraint** ensures that policing remains humane and rights-oriented. In *Joginder Kumar v. State of Uttar Pradesh*⁷, the Court held that the power of arrest cannot be exercised arbitrarily. Arrest must be necessary, justified, and reasonable, establishing the **principle of minimal use of force and proportionality** in policing.

A key principle shaping contemporary policing practices is **community engagement**, which views citizens as partners rather than passive subjects. Effective policing requires collaboration with communities to identify risks, resolve conflicts, gather intelligence, and promote social harmony. This principle draws inspiration from **Sir Robert Peel's classical principles of policing**, particularly the ideas that "the police are the public and the public are the police," that public approval is essential for police legitimacy, and that the greatest measure of police effectiveness is the absence of crime rather than the visible evidence of police action. Peel's philosophy laid the foundation for community policing, a model that encourages trust-building, dialogue, and cooperative problem-solving between the police and the public.

The principle of **professionalism** is equally significant in the Indian context. It requires the police to maintain high standards of integrity, discipline, competence, and ethical conduct

⁶(1997) 1 SCC 301, AIR 1997 SC 568, 1997 SCC (Cri) 92, 1996 SCC OnLine SC 1341

⁷(1994) 4 SCC 260, AIR 1994 SC 1349, 1994 Cri LJ 1981, 1994 SCC (Cri) 1172

in their duties. Professional policing demands continuous training, technological proficiency, adherence to procedures, and respect for evidence-based methods of investigation. Professionalism also encompasses responsiveness, which requires police officers to act swiftly and effectively during emergencies, public disturbances, or situations involving threats to life and property. In **Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar**⁸, this judgment further restricted unnecessary arrests and mandated compliance with **Section 41 CrPC**. It reinforced the **principle of professionalism, reasonableness, restrained policing, and accountability** of police officers.

Chapter X

Functions of Police

Police forces in India constitute the primary agency responsible for the **preservation of internal security, public order, and the enforcement of law**. Their functional mandate is derived from the Police Act, 1861, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, various State Police Acts, and constitutional safeguards under Articles 21 and 22. At the foundational level, the police are entrusted with **crime prevention, crime detection, law and order management, public safety, intelligence collection, disaster response, community engagement, and execution of auxiliary administrative duties**. Each of these functions operates within the broader framework of rule of law, human rights protection, impartiality, and professional accountability.

The most fundamental role of the police is **crime prevention**, a function that precedes and ideally reduces the need for punitive interventions. This preventive role involves systematic patrolling, surveillance, identification of crime-prone zones, analysis of behavioural patterns of habitual offenders, and the use of technological monitoring tools such as CCTV networks, beat systems, and predictive policing software. The **CrPC** recognizes preventive policing as a legitimate function, particularly through **Sections 149–151**, which empower police officers to interpose for the **prevention of cognizable offences** and to arrest individuals who are reasonably suspected of planning such offences. The Supreme Court continues to emphasize that preventive policing must align with the constitutional limits of **Articles 14 and 21**, ensuring that such power is not exercised arbitrarily.

⁸(2014) 8 SCC 273, AIR 2014 SC 2756, 2014 Cri LJ 3707, 2014 SCC OnLine SC 489

Investigative functions occupy the core of police operations once a crime has occurred. The process begins with information collection and the registration of a **First Information Report** under **Section 154** of the CrPC. The Supreme Court in *Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh (2014)* ruled that registration of an FIR is mandatory where information discloses a cognizable offence, thereby reinforcing transparency and accountability in the investigative process. During investigations, police officers are empowered to **arrest** suspects (**Sections 41–60 CrPC**), conduct **searches and seizures** (**Sections 91–105 CrPC**), **examine witnesses** (**Section 161 CrPC**), **collect evidence, and file charge sheets** under **Section 173 CrPC**. These powers are counterbalanced by constitutional protections and judicial guidelines. The landmark case *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997)* laid down binding norms for arrest and detention to prevent custodial violence, emphasizing that the investigative function must not violate fundamental rights.

Maintenance of public order forms another crucial dimension of police functioning. The police exercise preventive and regulatory powers to control assemblies, processions, and public demonstrations. Under **Section 129 CrPC**, they may **disperse unlawful assemblies**, while the executive may impose **Section 144 CrPC** in situations of **imminent danger** to public tranquility. Riot control, crowd management during festivals, political rallies, and emergencies constitute integral components of this domain. Courts have repeatedly acknowledged the delicate balance between maintaining order and preserving civil liberties. For instance, in *Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary, Union of India (2012)*⁹, the Supreme Court stressed that police actions during mass protests must be guided by proportionality and necessity.

Public safety forms the ethical and operational backbone of policing. Through traffic regulation, emergency response, accident management, rescue operations, and coordination with disaster-management authorities, police ensure the safety of life and property. Their role becomes particularly significant during natural disasters, industrial accidents, pandemics, and law-and-order emergencies.

The police also engage in **intelligence gathering**, particularly through local informants, surveillance networks, and district-level special branches. Intelligence mechanisms help

⁹ (2012) 5 SCC 1, 2012 AIR SCW 3660

prevent communal tensions, terrorism, organized crime, and threats to national security.

Contemporary policing increasingly emphasizes **community-based strategies** such as **Kerala's Janamaithri Suraksha Project** or **Tamil Nadu's Friends of Police movement**. Community policing focuses on building trust, enhancing citizen participation, and co-creating solutions to societal problems. This shift aligns with global best practices and the broader ideals of **Sir Robert Peel's philosophy** that the "police are the public, and the public are the police." Peel's principles minimum use of force, cooperation between police and community, prevention as the primary objective, and absolute impartiality have influenced the evolution of modern democratic policing, including India's reform discourse.

Auxiliary functions such as regulatory activities, verification services, issuance of licenses, escort duties, VIP protection, maintaining crime records, and administrative compliance form the extended responsibilities of the police. These duties ensure the smooth functioning of governmental and civic processes. The Indian police also operate under sector-specific legislations such as the **Arms Act, 1959** and the **Explosives Act, 1884** under which they are empowered to inspect, seize, and prosecute unlawful possession or transfer of arms and explosives.

Across these functional domains, the Indian police operate under the overarching constitutional mandate of **rule of law, impartial enforcement, and respect for human rights**. Judicial interventions such as *Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)* have sought to modernize and professionalize policing by mandating fixed tenure, separation of law-and-order functions from investigation, establishment of Police Complaints Authorities, and shielding operational decisions from political influence. While implementation varies across states, these reforms underscore the centrality of constitutional governance in police functioning.

1. Director General of Police (State Head)

At the **apex of the state** police hierarchy stands the Director General of Police (DGP), the **highest-ranking police officer** responsible for overall command, strategic planning, and policy coordination across the state. The DGP's functions primarily revolve around formulating statewide policing strategies, ensuring uniform implementation of statutory obligations, supervising specialized wings (intelligence, law and order, training, CID), and

advising the State Government on internal security matters. Their administrative authority includes major postings, disciplinary oversight, and monitoring state-wide crime trends. Judicial pronouncements such as *Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)* emphasized that the appointment of the DGP should be merit-based, secure, and protected from political interference to maintain professional autonomy.

2. Inspector General (IG) and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) - Range Level Supervision

At the intermediate command level, the Inspector General and Deputy Inspector General oversee policing within a designated “**Range**” comprising **multiple districts**. Their functions include reviewing crime patterns, monitoring performance of district units, ensuring coordination between districts, and conducting high-level inspections. They handle inter-district law-and-order concerns, supervise sensitive investigations, and ensure that the directives of the DGP are operationalized uniformly. These officers act as supervisory authorities for Superintendents of Police and are often involved in critical decision-making during communal tensions, elections, civil disturbances, or operations involving organized crime.

3. Superintendent of Police (SP) - District Police Chief

The Superintendent of Police serves as the administrative and operational head of the entire **district**. His role encompasses internal management, discipline enforcement, distribution of duties, resource allocation, and strategic law-and-order planning. The SP must ensure regular patrolling, intelligence coordination, and prompt response to emergencies. Importantly, the SP is mandated to personally supervise or investigate crimes of a grave nature such as murder, dacoity, dangerous conspiracies, and major economic offences. In cases involving misconduct by police personnel, the SP exercises disciplinary powers and initiates inquiries. As emphasized in *State of Bihar v. P.P. Sharma (1992)*¹⁰, the SP’s supervisory role must ensure fairness and impartiality in investigations. The SP also acts as the crucial link between civil administration and police administration, keeping the District Magistrate informed of matters affecting public peace.

¹⁰ 1992 Supp (1) SCC 222, 1992 SCC (Cri) 192, AIR 1991 SC 1260

4. Additional SP / Deputy SP / SDPO - Sub-Divisional Executive Supervision

The Additional SP or Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) assists the SP by exercising control over a subdivision comprising **several police stations**. Their functions are largely field-oriented, involving frequent inspections of police stations, verification of investigation quality, assessment of law-and-order vulnerabilities, and coordination during emergencies. The SDPO ensures that beat systems operate effectively, patrols are regular, and public grievances are timely addressed. In sensitive or complex cases, the SDPO personally supervises or directs the investigation. They are responsible for monitoring the conduct of station officers and reporting misconduct, particularly cases involving public harassment or unlawful detention, consistent with the constitutional safeguards recognised in *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997)*.

5. Circle Inspector (Law & Order / Crime) - Circle Level Operational Control

Circle Inspectors function as intermediate supervisory officers within a **cluster of police stations** known as a **Circle**. The **Law & Order Inspector** oversees riot control arrangements, crowd management during festivals or political gatherings, and coordination of bando bust duties. He analyses local tensions, mobilizes reserve forces when needed, and ensures quick deployment of personnel during disturbances. The **Crime Inspector**, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on crimes, especially professional, serial, economic, or organized offences. He ensures that all leads are followed systematically, that investigative work across multiple stations is not duplicated, and that intelligence is centrally analysed. Circle Inspectors are often the first senior responders at major crime scenes or law-and-order incidents.

6. Station House Officer (SHO) / Inspector or Sub-Inspector - Police Station Commander

The SHO, whether an **Inspector in urban stations** or **Sub-Inspector in rural and semi-urban areas**, forms the nucleus of grassroots policing. Statutorily recognized under **Section 2(o) CrPC** as the officer in charge of the **police station**, the SHO performs crucial functions such as registering FIRs, conducting investigations, preserving crime scenes, filing charge sheets, and ensuring law and order in the station jurisdiction. He maintains the General Diary, assigns duties to subordinates, conducts local intelligence gathering, and participates in community policing initiatives. The SHO must also cultivate relationships with village

headmen, local leaders, and marginalized groups to ensure accessibility and trust. Courts have repeatedly underlined the SHO's accountability, in *Bhajan Lal v. State of Haryana (1992)*¹¹ held that misuse of investigative powers may invite judicial intervention.

7. Sub-Inspectors (SI) - Lead Investigators and Field-Level Enforcers

Sub-Inspectors are primarily responsible for conducting investigations, supervising constables, preparing case diaries, and ensuring compliance with procedural requirements. They are legally empowered to **investigate cognizable offences** under **Sections 156 and 157 CrPC**. SIs conduct interrogations, collect evidence, prepare charges, and coordinate with forensic teams and prosecution officers. In the absence of the SHO, the senior-most SI assumes charge of the police station. Their work forms the backbone of evidence-based policing, and the quality of their investigation directly affects conviction rates.

8. Assistant Sub-Inspectors (ASI) - Support in Investigation & Administrative Roles

ASIs act as crucial intermediaries, assisting SIs in investigation, managing records, verifying documents, and supervising beat constables. They help prepare reports, maintain station files, conduct preliminary enquiries, and perform duties assigned by the SHO. ASIs often accompany SIs to crime scenes, record witness statements, and handle procedural documentation. Their role ensures the smooth functioning of both law-and-order and investigative activities.

9. Head Constables - Supervisory Constabulary

Head Constables supervise constables, maintain beat registers, and manage outposts. They may be assigned to clerical roles such as station writers, reflecting the trust placed in their experience. They assist in arrests, patrol duties, court attendance, and execution of warrants. Although they do not typically investigate grave offences independently, they may handle simple cases or assist in serious investigations under the guidance of SIs. Their regular interaction with the community enables early identification of tensions and crime risks.

¹¹ AIR 1992 SC 604, 1992 CriLJ 527 (SC), 1992 Supp (1) SCC 335, JT 1990 (4) SC 650, 1990 (2) SCALE 1066

10. Constables - Primary Operational Workforce

Constables constitute the **largest segment** of the police force and carry out frontline policing tasks such as patrolling, traffic control, surveillance, arrests, escort duties, and maintaining public order during gatherings. They serve summons, accompany officers during raids, and provide essential manpower for emergencies. Constables are often the first responders in crisis situations, and their conduct shapes public perception of the police. Their duties include **enforcement of preventive provisions** under **Sections 149 - 151 CrPC**, ensuring that offences are prevented before they occur. Under the Police Act, 1861, constables are expected to obey lawful orders, preserve peace, prevent crime, and protect property.

11. Specialized Branches - Functional Support Units

Several specialized units supplement the hierarchical policing system, such as the **District Armed Reserve, Special Branch, District Crime Record Bureau, Prohibition Enforcement Wing, Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDS), Foreigners Registration Unit, and Communication Wing**. These units provide reinforcement, intelligence analysis, record management, technology support, and specialized investigation skills. Their functioning is crucial for counter-terrorism, border surveillance, cybercrime management, and handling explosives or VIP security.

Chapter XI

Rural Policing in India

Rural policing represents one of the most significant yet critically under-resourced components of the Indian policing system. Nearly **two-thirds of India's population** resides in **rural areas**, making the rural police the primary state authority directly engaged with citizens on a daily basis. Unlike urban police forces, whose work is generally structured around conventional law-enforcement responsibilities, rural police officers are required to perform a much wider spectrum of duties. Their role extends beyond crime prevention and detection to include **social regulation, local dispute resolution, crisis intervention, agricultural land-related conflicts, caste-based tensions, and collaboration with panchayat institutions**. However, their ability to deliver these responsibilities is severely constrained by persistent structural challenges. Rural police stations operate with inadequate police-to-population ratios,

often far below national and international standards. Limited mobility caused by poor access to vehicles, difficult terrain, and weak communication infrastructure further hinders timely response and regular patrolling. Training deficiencies also affect rural policing, officers are seldom equipped with skills in mediation, forensic procedures, digital evidence handling, or community conflict management.

Additionally, rural policing is influenced by **local power hierarchies**, where dominant caste groups, political actors, and economic elites may exert pressure on police functioning, thereby undermining neutrality and the rule of law. **Socioeconomic tensions** arising from land disputes, resource scarcity, bonded labour, and entrenched caste inequities often escalate into law-and-order issues that rural police are expected to manage with minimal institutional support. Moreover, rural police personnel are burdened with a wide range of **non-core duties** such as revenue work, election-related responsibilities, census operations, welfare verifications, and disaster-relief coordination, all of which dilute their capacity to focus on core policing functions. Together, these factors create a complex and demanding environment in which rural police must operate, highlighting the urgent need for systemic reforms, increased resources, and specialized training tailored to the unique realities of rural India.

Chapter XII

Important Police Reforms

The **National Police Commission Reports (1977-82)** marked the first comprehensive post-Independence review of Indian policing and highlighted the urgent need for autonomy, professionalization, and insulation of the police from political interference. These reports significantly shaped later reform debates by exposing systemic weaknesses such as poor training, outdated laws, and structural vulnerability to external pressures.

The Supreme Court's **Prakash Singh Directions** built upon these findings and introduced legally enforceable mandates such as fixed tenures for senior officers, separation of investigation from law and order, establishment of Police Complaints Authorities, and creation of security commissions, all aimed at ensuring accountability and shielding the police from arbitrary control.

The **Model Police Act, 2006** attempted to replace the colonial **Police Act of 1861** by

proposing a modern legal framework focused on citizen-centric policing, transparency, accountability, and improved service delivery. It emphasized community engagement, better training, and independent oversight mechanisms, though adoption by states remains uneven.

The **Padmanabhaiah Committee** on Police Reforms examined structural and functional problems within the police, emphasizing modernization of equipment, improved mobility, enhanced investigation skills, and better coordination between agencies. It also underscored the need for increased manpower, scientific investigation, and technology-driven policing.

The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2007)** stressed systematic transformation by advocating for a professional, service-oriented police force through measures such as improved recruitment standards, technology integration, specialized units for new-age crimes, and robust accountability systems.

The **Modernization of Police Forces (MPF) Scheme** brought tangible improvements by funding weapon upgrades, forensic infrastructure, mobility, communication networks, training facilities, and cybercrime units, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and response time.

Finally, **Community Policing Models** like Kerala's **Janamaithri Suraksha Project**, Manipur's **Meira Paibi movement**, and Maharashtra's **Mohalla Committees** significantly strengthened police-community relations by fostering trust, collaborative problem-solving, crime prevention partnerships, and public participation in maintaining local peace and order. Together, these reforms collectively aim to shift Indian policing from a colonial, force-centric model to a more democratic, accountable, and community-oriented system.

Chapter XIII

Problems in Policing

Problems in policing in India remain deeply structural and multifaceted, affecting both the efficiency of the system and public confidence in law enforcement. One of the most persistent issues is excessive **political interference**, which undermines police autonomy and often compels officers to act under external pressure rather than according to professional standards. This challenge is compounded by chronic **infrastructural deficiencies**, including

outdated weapons, inadequate communication systems, and poorly maintained police stations, all of which limit operational capability. **Staff shortages** and the resulting workload imbalance place enormous strain on the force, reducing the quality of crime investigation, community outreach, and preventive policing.

Modern policing demands specialized skills, yet many personnel continue to receive **insufficient training** in areas like cybercrime investigation, forensic science, digital evidence handling, and human rights protection. These gaps contribute to serious concerns such as custodial violence, procedural violations, and growing public mistrust. The strained police-public relationship further weakens cooperation, intelligence gathering, and social legitimacy. Additionally, **weak accountability structures** and **ineffective internal oversight mechanisms** often prevent timely action against misconduct, fostering a culture where impunity can thrive. Together, these issues highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reforms aimed at professionalizing the police force, strengthening accountability, modernizing infrastructure, and redefining the police-public interface in India.

Chapter XIV

Criticisms of Indian Police System

Criticism of policing in India largely centres on the argument that the system retains a deeply **colonial character, prioritising control and coercion** over service and community engagement. The structural design of the Police Act of 1861 continues to promote a punishment-oriented and force-driven approach rather than a citizen-centric one, resulting in policing that often appears **authoritarian rather than democratic**.

Political interference remains a major source of public dissatisfaction, as it compromises operational independence and frequently leads to selective enforcement of laws.

Added to this is the persistent **lack of professionalism**, reflected in limited training, absence of modern skill development, and inadequate ethical orientation.

Numerous studies consistently highlight that **poor working conditions**, such as excessively long duty hours, inadequate rest, minimal welfare measures, and high occupational stress, directly contribute to inefficiency, burnout, and even misconduct within the force.

These systemic shortcomings manifest visibly in incidents of **human rights violations, custodial abuse, corruption, and procedural lapses**, all of which significantly erode public trust. The low level of confidence in the police, especially among marginalised communities, further weakens cooperation, intelligence gathering, and the legitimacy of policing as a public service. Collectively, these criticisms reveal the urgent need for a structural shift from colonial policing philosophies to modern, accountable, rights-respecting, and community-oriented policing practices in India.

Chapter XV

Suggestions for Improvement

- **Uniform Implementation of Police Reforms:** States must fully enforce the mandated structural reforms, including fixed tenure for officers, separation of law and order from investigation, and creation of oversight bodies. This will strengthen professionalism and reduce political interference.
- **Strengthen Rural Policing:** Increase investment in rural police stations through better infrastructure, digital tools, mobility, communication systems, and adequate staffing to improve response time and investigation quality.
- **Institutionalise Community Policing:** Expand community-police partnership models across India to build trust, improve intelligence gathering, and enhance crime prevention at the local level.
- **Upgrade Training & Skills:** Modernise police training academies and include modules on cybercrime, digital forensics, human rights, gender sensitivity, negotiation skills, crisis management, and scientific investigation.
- **Ensure Operational Autonomy:** Provide the police with protection from undue political influence by ensuring transparent transfers, merit-based promotions, fixed tenure, and independent oversight mechanisms.
- **Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish fully functional Police Complaints Authorities at state and district levels, improve internal vigilance, streamline disciplinary processes, and enhance transparency in handling complaints.

Chapter XVI

Conclusion

Policing in India has progressed significantly, but major structural and operational gaps still hinder its effectiveness. While the civil police remain the core of law enforcement, issues such as inadequate resources, political interference, outdated laws, and rising public expectations continue to challenge the system particularly in rural areas.

To build a modern and democratic police service, India must shift from a force-centric model to a people-oriented, accountable, and technology-driven approach. Strengthening training, improving infrastructure, adopting modern legislation, and enhancing community participation are essential steps. Equally important are ensuring operational autonomy, transparent functioning, and stronger internal and external accountability mechanisms.

Ultimately, meaningful reform will create a police system that upholds the rule of law, protects citizens' rights, responds efficiently to emerging challenges, and maintains public trust in a diverse and rapidly changing society.

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