

RE-IMAGINING POLICING IN A CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY: AN EVALUATION OF JUDICIARY AS A CATALYST FOR POLICE REFORM IN INDIA

by

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ABSTRACT

The Police system in India continues to be the by-product of the Colonial Rule to perform the twin task of maintenance of law and order and protection of life and liberty of the individual. India consists of 28 separate states and 8 Union territory. The Indian Constitution classifies "Police" as a State topic. This implies that they are governed by the laws and ordinances of the state in which they are situated. State-level rules and regulations provide the parameters for how the police are organized and function. Each state and federally recognized area has a unique police force. The paper's abstract gives an overview of the principles that the British used to build the police force they established in this nation and demonstrates how the colonial model of policing that was implemented did not include the concept of holding the police accountable to people outside the system. Police in modern days not only does the task of prevention of crimes and detection of criminals but also other welfare works like helping in the observance of traffic rules, control of crowds in public meetings and fairs, help the fire brigade and flood rescue parties, and help public in settling the minor disputes. The scope of this paper, is, however, not confined to only the definitional aspect of police. As the title indicates, this paper is going to present an overview regarding police reforms in India. Which challenges the Indian police system is facing? What ways are supposed to be followed to deal with these challenges? What is the stand of law in this regard—these are going to be the focal point in this paper in its succeeding parts.

Keywords: Protection of Life, Illegal Detention, Independent Judicial Commission, Right to Life,

Police Accountability

INTRODUCTION

The term “police” came from the Latin word “Politia” meaning civil administration, which itself is derived from Ancient Greek for “polis”. The first police force comparable to the present day police was established in 1667 under King Louis XIV in France, although modern policing trace its genesis to the 1800 establishment of Marine Police in London (a precursor later absorbed into the Metropolitan Police, which Sir Robert Peel separately founded in London in 1829), alongside the Glasgow Police and the Napoleon Police of Paris. Today, it broadly connotes the purposeful maintenance of public order and protection of person and property from the hazards of public accidents and the commission of unlawful activities. A fair and effective legal system hinges on efficient police reforms and unwavering accountability. This is vital for upholding the Rule of Law while ensuring that law enforcement agencies respect the rights of the people they've sworn to protect. Police forces must undergo modernisation and professionalisation to adapt to the evolving needs of society. Equally important is accountability, which acts as a crucial check against abuse of power. An accountable police force instils confidence in the public, a fundamental element of a competent force. Only when citizens feel safe and believe that their police adhere to high standards of conduct do they respond with peaceful and law-abiding behaviour.

The Indian police force grapples with various challenges, including political interference, inadequate training and resources, overworked and stressed personnel, and a lack of accountability. Instances of misconduct and abuse of authority further erode public trust in the police. This trust deficit is compounded by a persistent shortage of personnel: the Bureau of Police Research and Development places India's actual police strength at around 137 personnel per lakh of population, well short of the United Nations-recommended norm of 222 per lakh, leaving station-level staff overstretched even as workloads grow.¹ Understaffing of this magnitude inevitably affects both the quality of investigation and the courtesy with which citizens are treated at the police station.

On October 21st of each year, we observe Police Commemoration Day. This research strives

¹ PRS Legislative Research, 'Police Reforms in India' (PRS India, 2024) <<https://prsindia.org/policy/analytical-reports/police-reforms-india>> accessed 14 August 2026.

to spotlight accountability measures that can be implemented and advocate for specific actions that will create a police force that is not only transparent and efficient but also dedicated to its citizens' needs. When an any offence occurs in India, a person must first approach the local Police Station first to file a First Information Report (FIR).

The Police system in India continues to be the by-product of the Colonial Rule to perform the twin task of maintenance of law and order and protection of life and liberty of the individual. The call for the reforms of the archaic laws and codes governing Indian Police system is caught in the seamless web of political reluctance at the hands of State and red-tapism within the bureaucratic order. This is best evident in the collapse of the experiment of Community Policing in contemporary times (a forum for Public –Police interface), wherein, due to mistrust among the people, lack of sensitisation among police force in dealing with the disadvantaged/victimised section and absence of reform in the structure and conditions of the police personnel, has marred the very purpose for which a responsive and responsible police force is created for its citizens. The experience has, however, not been uniformly negative. Kerala's Janamaithri Suraksha Project, launched in 2008, is frequently cited as an instance in which beat officers sustained regular contact with residents and built durable community mediation structures, suggesting that the success of such models depends heavily on institutional continuity rather than the enthusiasm of individual officers.²

POLICE SYSTEM IN COLONIAL INDIA

Various efforts were made by East India Company, particularly after the victory in Battle of Plassey of 1757, when they gradually undertook administrative charge of the country as a result of dissolution of Mughal Empire. Its major contribution lay in outlining the weaknesses of native police system during the decline of the Mughal rule due to two primary reasons:

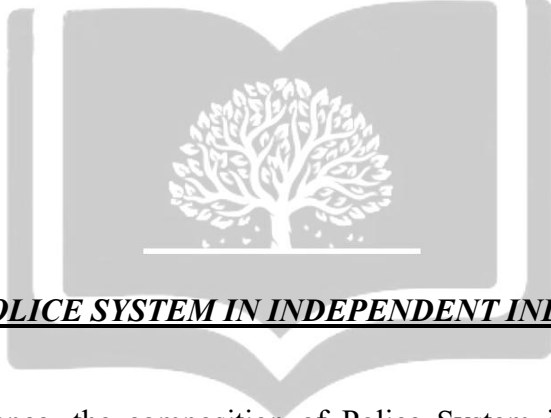
- a) The executive and judicial functions in Bengal and the corresponding revenue functions in Madras and Bombay were unsound and unpropitious.
- b) The subordinate police officers were both numerically weak and poorly paid and supervised.³

² 'Reinventing Policing Through Community Engagement' (TheLaw.Institute, 21 February 2026) <<https://thelaw.institute/criminal-justice-administration/reinventing-policing-community-engagement/>> accessed 14 August 2026.

³ Anandswarup Gupta, The Police in British India, 1861-1947 (Delhi: Concept publishing House, 1979)

One of the salient features of the Indian police under the British was to separate its preventive and investigative agency from the authority which tried criminals. It was witnessed in the form of creation of police and the army involved in the arrangement of collection and dissemination of political intelligence, the complete codification of laws and a neat arrangement of bureaucracy to preserve alien rule. But the incidents of crime, dacoity and civil unrest continued unabatedly.

A reorganization of the police system was put to immediate discussion since the Dispatch of Court of Directors of 1856, though with a different objective and a new police Act was passed in Madras in 1859. Analysing the functioning of the system a year later, a police Commission was appointed in 1860 bearing in mind the instructions that the “police are either protective and repressive or detective” and “that the line that separates the protective and repressive functions from military, may not always, in India, be very clear”. For the first time in history of India, the entire detailing out of Police System has been devised by the British with the enactment of the Police Act, 1861.



POLICE SYSTEM IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

At the time of Independence, the composition of Police System included 516 officers (323 Europeans, 63 Muslims and 130 Hindus and others).⁴ With the signing of the Indian Independence Bill and declaration of Independence on 15th August, the leaders concluded that empires represent a subjugation of human spirit, held together by armed might. It continued under colonial appendage of the codified Police Act V of 1861 along with the Indian Penal Code, 1860, The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1861 and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.⁵ The police today are state subjects, with states having exclusive powers over their control and regulation.⁶ The entire direction of the Union Government has led to the conditioning of the framework of police system, influencing its policy implementation and controlling state autonomy. The division of

⁴ P.J GRIFFITHS, OP.CIT, P 561

⁵ See Arvind, Verma, The Indian Police, A Critical Evaluation, New Delhi, Regency Publications, 2005, p.16

⁶ Government of India, Constitution, Seventh Schedule, List II, item 2

powers is subject to modification in cases like, the state of emergency declared by the Government of India, subject to ratification by parliament in which case it may enact legislation with respect to any item on the list reserved for the states (Article 352-360); any combination of states may allow the Parliament by vote of their Legislature to intervene in matters on the State List. This marks the trend to a centralized federal structure. It is also centralized in the sense that senior police officers are recruited nationally as members of the Indian Police Service (IPS), which together with the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), is one of the three All-India Services. The Union Government also possesses two police forces of its own namely the Central Reserve Police Force and Central Bureau of Investigation. Despite the state having its separate criminal investigation departments, training wings, the Central Bureau of Investigation and Central Intelligence Bureau as listed in the Union List in 7th Schedule of the Constitution of Article 246 has the tendency to convert into regular line agencies overtaking the jurisdiction of state police organization. This tendency has become more pronounced in recent years. Data compiled by PRS Legislative Research show that the combined sanctioned strength of the Union Government's central police forces, led by the Central Reserve Police Force at roughly three lakh personnel, grew by about 37 per cent between 2006 and 2016, a rate of expansion considerably higher than that recorded by most State police forces over the same period.⁷

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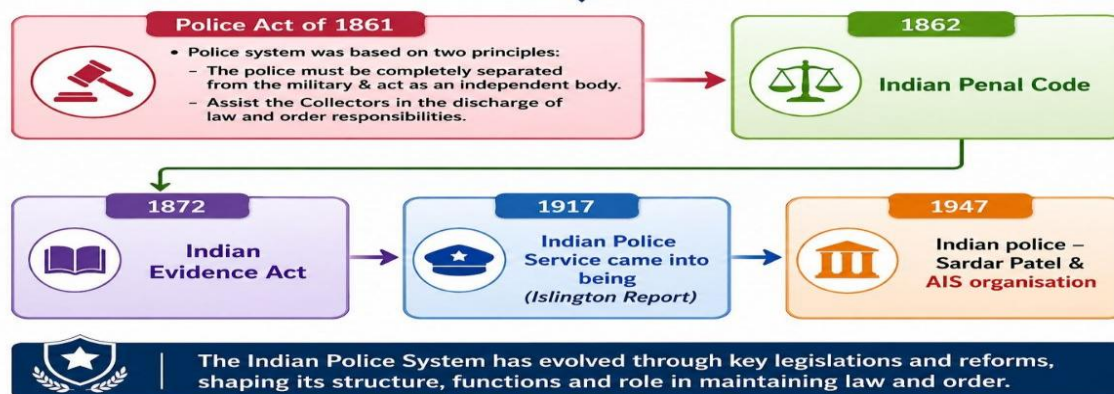
CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING POLICE

According to the Constitution (Which derived majority of provision from the GOI act 1935), the police force is a state subject. States draw rules, regulations and guidelines for the police manual. The organization structure of police forces in India is fairly uniform in all the states throughout the country which is even today based on 1861 act. The States are empowered to enact any law regarding police and it is primarily the State Governments, which have to implement the various measures of police reforms. The Centre can grant funds to the States on a State subject, but

⁷ PRS Legislative Research, 'Police Reforms in India' (PRS India, 2024) <<https://prsindia.org/policy/analytical-reports/police-reforms-india>> accessed 14 August 2026.

cannot enforce implementation of reforms. It can only issue advisories to the States to bring in the requisite reforms. The Committee was informed by the MHA that the report of the Mooshahary Committee was forwarded to all the States/UTs to initiate action on the 49 recommendations made therein. MHA from time to time also issued advisories/reminders to the States/UTs to implement the recommendations and to furnish the status thereof. As per the information provided by the Ministry, 24 States/UTs have provided the status of implementation of these recommendations. 12 States/UT i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Haryana, Jharkhand, Lakshadweep, Odisha, Rajasthan, Puducherry, Ladakh and West Bengal have not provided any information despite reminders. The status on implementation of the 49 Recommendations of Review Committee headed by Shri R.S. Mooshahary by the various States/UTs of the report. This pattern of selective compliance is not unique to the Mooshahary Committee. A 2024 assessment by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative similarly found that most States have amended or replaced their police manuals only superficially, adopting the outward form of reform while leaving the underlying command structures and political oversight largely intact.⁸

STATUS OF POLICE IN INDIA



CRIMINAL LIABILITY IN THE LAW

⁸ 'Police Reforms in India: Prakash Singh Case, SC Directives & Implementation Status' (Anantam IAS, 26 March 2026) <<https://anantamias.com/police-reforms-in-india/>> accessed 14 August 2026.

Officials working for the government have certain safeguards in place to prevent them from being held criminally liable for any actions taken by law enforcement in the course of their official responsibilities, as outlined in the "Cr.P.C of 1973(Now BNSS,2023) ." For the protection of police officers, the provisions of sections 197(Now 218 Bnss)Prosecution Of judges and public servant and 132(Now 151 Bnss) Protection against prosecution for act done under section 148-150 bnss have been maintained. When a police officer is accused of wrongdoing "whether acting or purporting to act within the course of his official obligations," disciplinary action cannot be taken without the prior approval of the Central or State Government, as stated above. Sections 129–131 of the Cr.P.C(Now 148-150 Bnss) "deal with controlling an unlawful gathering that is deemed to have caused a breach of peace," and these provisions make it impossible for the government to sue police officers for any actions taken in accordance with them. Section 132(Now sec 151 Bnss) expressly forbids such conduct. Police officers are protected under Section 132 if they can show that they attempted to disperse an unlawful assembly without resorting to force and that other means of dispersal had failed. In the case "*P.P. Unnikrishnan v. Puttiyottil Alikutty*,"⁹ two police officers were accused of detaining a complainant against his will and assaulting him over the course of many days. The Supreme Court's division bench had to rule on a "defence raised by police officers under Section 64 of the Kerala Police Act, which provides procedural safeguards against legal proceedings brought against police officers acting in good faith in the execution of any duty imposed or authority conferred by the state." The Supreme Court has said that the reasoning for this clause may be found in Section 197(Now sec 218 Bnss) of the Cr.P.C. As a result, the Supreme Court ruled that "there must be a reasonable connection between the act and the discharge of official duty; the act must bear such relation to the duty that the accused could lay a reasonable claim, but not a pretended or fanciful claim, that he did it in the course of performing his duty." The Court also provides an example of how a police officer violates Section 197 of the Cr.P.C when he unlawfully holds a suspect for more than twenty-four hours or physically assaults a civilian. The practical consequences of this protective framework are reflected in official data: between 1999 and 2023, government figures record 2,253 deaths in police custody nationally, yet only three of the accompanying prosecutions ended in conviction, all in 2017, with no further conviction

⁹ (1999) CRILJ 4261

recorded between 2018 and 2023.¹⁰ Such figures suggest that the procedural shield examined above operates, in practice, far more often to protect officers from prosecution than the 'reasonable connection' test articulated by the Supreme Court was originally intended to permit. In a police torture case that lasted three days, a single bench of the Gujarat High Court relied on this interpretation of Section 197 Crpc. A case involving widespread human rights violations was heard by a divisional bench of the High Court of Allahabad. These violations included the shooting of protesters at a protest assembly, which resulted in the deaths of twenty-four people, as well as mass murder, rape, unlawful arrests, and a high number of prisoners per capita. Similarly, "*Uttarakhand Sangharsh Samiti v. State UP*"¹¹ is another lawsuit that has been filed. When the matter of a State Government's sanction under Section 197 of the Cr.P.C. arose, the division bench ruled that "it is not every conduct done by a public servant while on duty which comes under the ambit of S. 197 but only those actions which have direct linkage to the fulfilment of official duties." According to "Privy Council as well as Apex Court judgments,"¹⁶ acts such as "arbitrary restraint and detention," "planting weapons to show false recovery," "deliberate shooting of unarmed protesters," "fabricating or framing misleading records," "commission of rape and violence," and others are considered or believed to have been committed in the course of official duties.¹²

The following inferences may be drawn from the existing examples. The procedural protection provided by Section 197 Cr.P.C. only applies if the offending police officer can demonstrate that the alleged criminal behaviour was done while carrying out official obligations. When evaluating whether or not to file charges against a police officer, it is necessary to take into account whether or not the officer's acts were in the course of his official duties. Second, whether or not the activities were beyond the scope of official responsibilities depends on whether or not the police are officially authorised to conduct that task.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFORM DIRECTIVES

India's police continue to be governed by an archaic and colonial police law passed in 1861. The

¹⁰ 'Deaths in Custody Persist, Convictions Remain Rare' (Factly, 1 April 2026) <<https://factly.in/deaths-in-custody-persist-convictions-remain-rare/>> accessed 14 August 2026.

¹¹ (1996) 1 UPLBEC 461

¹² Commonwealth Human Right Initiative (2010) Seven Steps to police reforms. CHRI pp 5-12

Indian Constitution makes policing a state subject and therefore the state governments have the responsibility to provide their communities with a police service. However, after independence most have adopted the 1861 Act without change, while others have passed laws heavily based on the 1861 Act. The need for reform of police in India and - fundamentally- the police laws, has been long recognised. There has been almost 30 years of debate and discussion by government created committees and commissions on the way forward for police reform, but India remains saddled with an outdated and old-fashioned law, while report after report gathers dust on government bookshelves without implementation. This Research sets out selected reforms of these committees, beginning with the National Police Commission, the first committee set up by the Indian government to report on policing. The National Police Commission began sitting in 1979, in the context of a post Emergency India, and produced eight reports, including a Model Police Act, between 1979 and 1981. In 1996, two former senior police officers filed a public interest case with the Supreme Court, asking for the Court to direct governments to implement the recommendations of the National Police Commission. The Supreme Court directed the government to set up a committee to review the Commission's recommendations, and the Ribeiro Committee was born. The Committee, under the leadership of J.F. Ribeiro, a former chief of police, sat over 1998 and 1999, and produced two reports. In 2000, the government set up a third committee on police reform, this time under the stewardship of a former union Home Secretary, Mr. K. Padmanabhaiah. This Committee released its report in the same year. In 2005, the government put together a group to draft a new police Act for India. Headed by a senior advocate of the Supreme Court, Mr. Soli Sorabjee, the Police Act Drafting Committee submitted a Model Police Act to the union government in late 2006. At the same time, the Supreme Court made further directions in the long running public interest litigation on police reform. The Court directed the governments of India to implement police reform, and provided them with a framework within which to begin the reform process. Selected recommendations from each of these committees have been included in this Research, as well as the Supreme Court directives. Two government committees that took place between 2001 and 2004 and made recommendations regarding the police have not been included as they either dealt with broader criminal justice issues (the 2001-2003 Malimath Committee on Reforms of Criminal Justice System) or were limited to prioritising the recommendations of previous committees (the 2004 2005 Review Committee on the Recommendations of National Police Commission and Other

Commission/Committees). Even where selected recommendations of these committees were formally accepted by the Union Government, implementation at the State level remained uneven, since policing is constitutionally a State subject and the Centre's role is confined to advisory coordination rather than enforcement. This structural limitation helps explain why successive committees, despite differing in composition and mandate, repeatedly arrived at similar conclusions regarding political interference and weak accountability.

JUDICIAL INTERVENTION IN POLICE REFORMS

After Independence, India witnessed profound political, social, and economic transformations. The police were expected to be no longer just a colonial force to maintain order; they became central to delivering justice, safeguarding rights, and even enabling social change and economic growth. Yet the institution remained governed by the outdated Police Act of 1861, leaving it vulnerable to political interference, weak accountability mechanisms, arbitrary transfers, custodial violence, poor investigation standards, declining public trust and systemic abuse of power. This gap between the people's democratic aspirations and the police's colonial structure was at the heart of public mistrust. Recognising this urgent need for reform, Prakash Singh, former Director General of Police (DGP), and N K Singh, along with Common Cause, filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court (SC) in 1996. While the police veterans exposed the internal distortions of the force, Common Cause brought in the citizens' perspectives, showing how unchecked police power had led to custodial torture, arbitrary arrests, fabricated cases, and widespread denial of justice, especially for the poor and marginalised. For Common Cause, this was not only about institutional efficiency but about restoring public faith in the rule of law. The petitioners relied extensively on the findings of previous commissions to recommend better policing mechanisms. Observing the gravity of the situation and the absence of legislative action, SC held that it could no longer wait for governments to act and was compelled to issue binding directions for immediate compliance. The Court clarified that these directions would operate as law under Article 142 of the Constitution until suitable legislation was enacted. The

SC's judgment in *Prakash Singh and Others v. Union of India and Others*¹³ thus represents a historic intervention. The judgment, delivered on September 22, 2006, laid down seven binding directives aimed at initiating comprehensive police reform across the country. These directions were to remain in force until appropriate legislation was enacted by the Central and State Governments. To oversee compliance with these seven directives, the Supreme Court subsequently constituted a Monitoring Committee headed by former Justice K.T. Thomas. Even this supervisory mechanism reported little progress, and by 2019 the Court itself observed that several States were treating its directions as mere suggestions rather than binding orders.¹⁴

After 15 long year , The current status of implementation of standards is dismal(*Matajog Dubey Vs HC Bhari*¹⁵;*Balbir singh V DN Kadian*).¹⁶There is not a single state or territoire in the union that has fully coplied with all of the regulations,even on paper,much alone in practice(*HHB Gill v The king*¹⁷ ; *Amrik Singh V State Of Pepsu*).¹⁸

Independent assessments bear out this dismal record in concrete terms. A 2024 assessment by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative found that no State had achieved full compliance with all seven directives, with Kerala, Meghalaya and Tripura recording comparatively better implementation, while Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, ironically Prakash Singh's home State, ranked among the weakest performers.¹⁹

Prakash Singh v/s Union of India: the Supreme Court Directives 2006-2007

In 1996, two former Director Generals of Police filed a public interest case with the Supreme Court. In the case, they requested the Supreme Court to direct central and state governments to address the poor quality and performance of police in India. In 2006, the Court ruled that given the “gravity of the problem” and “total uncertainty as to when police reforms would be introduced” it would issue “appropriate directions for immediate compliance”. These directions are binding upon central and state governments. Governments were initially required to report to

¹³ (2006) 8 SCC 1

¹⁴ 'Police Reforms in India: Prakash Singh Case, SC Directives & Implementation Status' (Anantam IAS, 26 March 2026) <<https://anantamias.com/police-reforms-in-india/>> accessed 14 August 2026.

¹⁵ AIR (1956) SC 44

¹⁶ AIR (1986) Sc 345

¹⁷ AIR (1948) PC 128

¹⁸ AIR(1955) SC 309

¹⁹ 'Police Reforms in India: Prakash Singh Case, SC Directives & Implementation Status' (Anantam IAS, 26 March 2026) <<https://anantamias.com/police-reforms-in-india/>> accessed 14 August 2026.

the Court on steps taken to comply with the directions at the end of 2006. The majority of states filed applications seeking more time. Some of these applications also sought review of the judgment. The court refused to review its directions and ruled that governments were required to comply with its directions by the end of March 2007. The following are some of important directions given by the Supreme Court.

Prakash Singh v UOI 2006



20 YEARS OF PRAKASH SINGH VERDICT

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Prakash Singh Vs Union of India is among India's most legendary judgments. It created quite a stir, and some euphoria, when it came in 2006. It was justifiably celebrated as the police reforms judgment. But optimism gradually gave way to cynicism when it was honoured more in the breach than in observance. The implementation by the states met with reluctance, defiance or half-hearted compliance.

Today, the milestone judgment stands as a bleak reflection on India's polity and governance. The long running saga—from the filing of the PIL in 1996 to the judgment in 2006, to its botched implementation today—testifies why, the more things change, the more they stay the same, and why we must all be worried and alarmed. I believe that the citizens deserve better in the world's largest democracy and an emerging economic powerhouse. It reminds us that a systemic change

would require more than a court order, perhaps a relentless fight at many levels. But before we come to the nitty-gritties, let us recount what is so consequential in the judgment. First and foremost, it sought to make the police accountable to the Constitution. It highlighted that the police's commitment, devotion, and accountability must be solely to the rule of law and not to the rulers of the day. The order removed arbitrariness from key functions and bolstered investigation. It made the key appointments rule-based, tenured and multi-partisan, and provided for a police complaints authority at the state and district levels. The idea is to make sense of the big picture of what is lost and found, what must be non negotiable, and what can still be salvaged through advocacy, public pressure and good sense. We have also tried to weave in global comparisons and India's own best practices. The fight for police reforms is not just against government apathy and obstinacy, it is also against the cynicism of key stakeholders, particularly activists, politicians and former top cops. For instance, the activists feel that the verdict focused on shielding the police from politicians, and not on making them accountable to the law. The politicians feel that it undermines federalism and dilutes their power to hire and fire the police leadership. The police officers feel that it has complicated postings and promotions, and undermined the powers of the DGPs. While the reasons may be valid, they do not merit pessimism. For instance, shielding police from political interference is a step towards police autonomy, a precondition for professionalism and accountability. The check on the unfettered executive powers balances the choice of incumbents against their eligibility and suitability. Nothing stops the stakeholders from improving things further and rooting for more systemic reforms. We believe that police reforms must be treated as a continuous process. And that is why Prakash Singh must be seen not as another verdict but as a building block for better things to come. Proper police reforms in a democracy need a citizen-oriented ecosystem, with witness and whistleblower protection, grievance redressal, adherence to the conflict-of-interest principle and strengthening the RTI law. But before that, the 2006 verdict must be implemented in letter and spirit. It is long overdue. The scale of the shortfall can be quantified: a 2024 review by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative found that not a single State had achieved full compliance with all seven directives nearly two decades after they were issued, even though many States had by then passed new Police Acts or amendments purporting to give effect to them.²⁰

²⁰ 'Police Reforms in India: Prakash Singh Case, SC Directives & Implementation Status' (Anantam IAS, 26 March

FROM BAD TO WORSE

At the 60th All India Conference of Director Generals/Inspector Generals of police in Raipur, held on the theme 'Viksit Bharat: Security Dimensions', the Prime Minister stressed the urgent need to improve public perception of the police by enhancing their professionalism, sensitivity, and responsiveness. Independent surveys of the force itself lend weight to this call for change. The Status of Policing in India Report 2025, based on interviews with over 8,000 police personnel across seventeen States, found that a significant proportion of officers continued to regard the use of third-degree methods during interrogation as justified in certain circumstances, indicating that professionalisation initiatives have yet to alter attitudes on the ground.²¹

COMPARATIVE POLICING: WHAT INDIA CAN LEARN FROM GLOBAL MODELS

For India, the framework already exists in the form of the Prakash Singh judgment. What is needed now is movement from intent to implementation. Looking at how other countries have operationalised similar ideas can help bridge this gap and make reform more real, and more effective.

Canada: Getting the Balance Right

Canada's policing story is interesting because it did not start perfect—it evolved. Over time, the system moved away from a strict 'catch-the-criminal-at-all-costs' approach to one that takes rights and procedures seriously. Today, things like proper evidence collection, legal safeguards, and civilian oversight are built into everyday policing. Independent bodies regularly review police actions. If evidence is collected improperly, it can be rejected in court. This pushes officers to follow the law carefully. At the same time, Canadian policing is not weak. Officers still act firmly when required, but within a clear legal framework. Another striking feature is how police time is used. A large part of their work involves helping people, resolving disputes, and preventing problems, not just registering crimes. This makes policing feel less like force and more like a service. Ontario's Special Investigations Unit, created in 1990 and placed on an independent statutory footing by the Special Investigations Unit Act 2019, is often cited as a

2026) <<https://anantamias.com/police-reforms-in-india/>> accessed 14 August 2026.

²¹ 'Status of Policing in India Report 2025: Bias & Flaws' (LeDroit India, 24 September 2025) <<https://ledroitindia.in/status-of-policing-in-india-report-2025-bias-flaws/>> accessed 14 August 2026.

model of this kind of civilian oversight, since it investigates every police-involved death, serious injury, and firearm discharge without operational reliance on the police service under examination.²²

Denmark: Trust Built Through Independence

Denmark has taken a very clear position on accountability—the police should not investigate themselves. An independent watchdog body handles complaints against police officers. Whether it is a serious allegation or a routine complaint, the investigation is done outside the police system. This may sound simple, but it makes a huge difference. Because the process is independent, people are more willing to come forward. And because officers know they are being reviewed externally, there is a natural check on misuse of power. Over time, this has built a system where credibility comes from transparency, not just authority. Countries like Denmark consistently rank high in global policing indices not just because of low crime, but because people trust the system to be fair. Denmark formalised this principle through the Independent Police Complaints Authority, established on 1 January 2012 to conduct both criminal investigations and misconduct inquiries into police officers wholly outside the ordinary police and prosecutorial hierarchy.²³ An academic evaluation of the body has nonetheless found that many complainants regard its processes as slow and its findings as tilted in favour of police officers, a reminder that formal independence does not by itself guarantee public confidence.²⁴

Japan: Policing That Lives in the Neighbourhood

Japan's Koban system is often cited as one of the most effective forms of community policing in the world. Across cities and towns, small police posts (called Kobans) are placed within neighbourhoods. Officers don't just visit these areas—they are part of them. They patrol on foot, know the residents, help with directions, assist in local issues, and step in early when problems arise. Because of this constant presence, people don't hesitate to approach the police. Trust builds naturally through such daily interaction. This also changes how crime is handled. Many issues are resolved much before they escalate into serious offences. The focus is on preventing crime through relationships. The system shows that when policing is local, visible, and

²² 'Special Investigations Unit – The Unit' (Special Investigations Unit, Ontario) <<https://www.siu.on.ca/en/unit.php>> accessed 14 August 2026.

²³ 'Denmark – Danish Independent Police Complaints Authority' (International Police Complaints Authorities Network) <<https://ipcan.org/tag/denmark>> accessed 14 August 2026.

²⁴ Lars Holmberg, 'In Service of the Truth? An Evaluation of the Danish Independent Police Complaints Authority' (2019) *European Journal of Criminology* <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1477370819856514>> accessed 14 August 2026.

approachable, it becomes far more effective. According to Japan's National Police Agency, there are approximately 6,300 koban and a similar number of residential chuzaisho nationwide, each typically staffed by a small team of officers who combine patrol duties with routine home visits and neighbourhood liaison councils.²⁵

The European & UK Model: Accountability through Independent Oversight

Across Europe and the UK, one principle is clear: the police cannot be the sole judge of their own conduct. This is reflected in the European Code of Police Ethics which emphasises accountability to the State, citizens, and independent institutions. In practice, this has led to strong external oversight systems. Countries like Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium have set up independent bodies operating outside the police chain of command, with real investigative powers and public reporting. Their functioning reflects standards shaped by the European Court of Human Rights—investigations must be independent, prompt, effective, open to public scrutiny, and involve victims. In the UK, this approach is reinforced by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, which investigates serious cases such as death, injury, or corruption. At the same time, the traditional 'bobby on the beat' remains a defining feature—ordinary officers are still not permitted to carry firearms, relying instead on communication, restraint, and public consent, with specialized armed units deployed only when necessary. The result is a system where accountability is built into everyday policing, helping sustain both credibility and public trust. The scale of the IOPC's oversight function is considerable: in 2023/24 alone it recorded over 85,000 complaints against police forces in England and Wales, and in the following reporting year it independently investigated more than one hundred deaths occurring during or following police contact, publishing detailed findings on each.²⁶

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

²⁵ National Police Agency of Japan, 'Community Safety Bureau'

<https://www.npa.go.jp/english/bureau/community_safety/index.html> accessed 14 August 2026.

²⁶ 'IOPC Director General Comments on Police Complaints Statistics Report 2023/24' (Independent Office for Police Conduct, 19 February 2025) <<https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/IOPC+Director+General+comments+on+Police+Complaints+Statistics+report+202324+19022025091000>> accessed 14 August 2026; 'IOPC Publishes Latest Statistics on Deaths During or Following Police Contact in England and Wales' (Independent Office for Police Conduct, 30 July 2026) <<https://wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/IOPC+publishes+latest+statistics+on+deaths+during+or+following+police+contact+in+England+and+Wales+30072026122000>> accessed 14 August 2026.

The police reform in the structural aspect, which is least controversial, must be undertaken in a gradual but time-bound manner. The inadequacy in the structures of police are responsible not only for the increasing crime rates but also for the loss of confidence of people on the **efficiency of police to deal with the crimes**. The progressive filling-up of vacancies in police organizations must also take care of the **gender representation** and must take adequate number of women into the ranks of police. The disabling conditions for women in police must be corrected, and women should feel comfortable in pursuing their duties. Recent data underline the scale of this challenge: the India Justice Report 2025 found that women constituted only about 12.3 per cent of the police force nationally as of January 2023, with fewer than 1,000 women holding senior gazetted positions such as Superintendent of Police or Director General across the country, and noted that not a single State or Union Territory had met its own reservation target for women's recruitment.²⁷ The police organizations in both states lack the infrastructure necessary for efficient policing like adequate transportation facilities, computers and **technical experts** to deal with the increasing cybercrimes, adequate weaponry etc. These infrastructural gaps are corroborated by national data: as of January 2023 the countrywide police vacancy rate stood at approximately 22 per cent, and the average State spent only about 1.25 per cent of its police budget on training, figures that help explain the persistence of the equipment and staffing shortfalls described above.²⁸ These states should provide enough financial resources to their police organizations to cope up with these inadequacies. **Training** should not be a one-time exercise but should be imparted to the police officers at regular intervals. The police **orientation programmes** should be undertaken and these programmes should be made mandatory for police officers. There should be an **increased public-police collaboration**. Policing is a predominantly public-oriented service, and efforts should be made to elicit cooperation of public and its trust over the police. The principles of **community policing** that have been incorporated in the policing organizations of most of Western countries can be a guiding light in this regard. Kerala's Janamaithri Suraksha Project and Punjab's SAANJH Kendras, which had grown to twenty-seven district-level and over three hundred and sixty police-station-level centres by 2019,

²⁷ 'India Justice Report 2025: Less than 1,000 Women Cops in Top Ranks, 90% in Constabulary Positions' (Maktoob Media, 15 April 2025) <<https://maktoobmedia.com/india/india-justice-report-2025-less-than-1000-women-cops-in-top-ranks-90-in-constabulary-positions/>> accessed 14 August 2026.

²⁸ 'Chronic Vacancies, Paltry Training Budgets, Unfulfilled Women Quotas: IJR Data Shows How Police Are Faring' (The Wire, 23 April 2025) <<https://m.thewire.in/article/government/police-vacancies-ijr-report-women-quota-unfulfilled/amp>> accessed 14 August 2026.

illustrate that such models can be sustained in India when backed by consistent institutional support rather than the initiative of individual officers.²⁹ The corruption is one of the biggest malaises that has perpetually tarnished the image of the police organization in eyes of public. The **independent judicial commission** should be established to look into the cases of corruption and police excesses. The commission must have binding powers of recommending to appropriate authorities the suspension or termination of services of tainted police officers. The **Supreme Court guidelines** that were issued in 2006 must be **re-examined and re-appraisal of the compliance** with the directives must be undertaken under the supervision of the Court itself. The states must Be made accountable to the Court for the action-taken, and genuine reasons for the non-compliance studied.



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²⁹ 'Grassroots Policing: The Evolution of Community Policing in India' (TheLaw.Institute, 21 February 2026) <<https://thelaw.institute/criminal-justice-administration/community-policing-evolution-india/>> accessed 14 August 2026.