

Press Reports on Human Rights Violations in India

A Tiny Sample Study

ALERT citizen's groups in many places over the world have contributed much to exposing human rights abuses by state organs and to biases in reporting through forming 'media watch' groups. The idea is to carefully scan media reports and, (as somewhat we have done here) classify the data collected. Such scanning also clearly highlights policy biases in reportage by government-controlled or other partisan media.

In order to make a small random study of press-reports on human rights violations, we turned to two files maintained by the Centre for Education and Documentation Bombay, one on police atrocities/encounters/combing operations/brutality and the other on 'civil liberties/democratic rights/infringements/organisations/enquiries etc'. There were no direct reports on specific instances of violation in the second category for the period we looked up: July-September 1988. The first file yielded 32 items from nine major dailies and five magazines. We did an exercise on classifying these reports in two ways i) statewise and ii) by type of human rights violation—an arbitrary but marginally useful exercise.

What we drew from our classification is as follows: 8 reports from Maharashtra (2 from Bombay but most others also from areas nearby), 3 from Orissa, 2 from Bihar and UP and 1 each from Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan and West Bengal. (4 items were 'repeat' reports not counted here and 3 not clear). Three reports covered the whole country. (Of course, it must be pointed out that at CED we receive more dailies

from Bombay than anywhere else. Hence perhaps the large number of instances reported for Maharashtra).

The 'type of human right violation' exercise yielded the following results:

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|---|---|
| 1. Torture/death in lockup | 6 |
| 2. Police beatings/assault | 5 |
| 3. Illegal arrests/detention/seizure | 4 |
| 4. Marauding, terrorism, oppression of depressed sections | 3 |
| 5. Direct killing/shooting | 2 |
| 6. False encounters | 3 |
| 7. Sexual abuse (including gangrape) | 3 |
| 8. Framing false charges | 2 |
| 9. General reports on human rights abuse on state/nation basis. | 5 |

(one report has been counted under both 3 and 7).

Scanning these reports, there seem to be two major categories of 'motives' for these acts. In half the cases, the victims have clearly been earmarked for political repression through the use of violence (and abuse of machinery that is supposedly meant to protect the rights of common citizens). Roughly another half are simply victims of the police machinery blatantly overstepping its brief: either out on a drunken, marauding spree or unleashing calculated brutality against weak, marginalised sections and/or person(s) who have in some way (sometimes unwittingly) exposed the weaknesses in the state machinery.

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but were not. He was, however, examined in 1966 and found to be sane. Yet he rotted in jail. In 1981 after news of his detention was published in a newspaper he was once again mentally examined and found to be sane. He was released in 1983 almost 35 years too late.

Like Gomia-Ho there were cases of many other prisoners who were kept in jail as the mental hospitals were full.

In *Charles Sobhraj's* case (1978, 4.SCC.494) the prisoner was kept day and night under bar fetters. The doctor examining the prisoner had noted:

09.2.1977: Multiple infected wounds on right ankles. Bar fetters be removed from right leg for 15 days (Sd) Dr. Mittal R.M.O.

12.2.1977: Bar fetters also to be removed from left foot. (Sd) Dr Bokra.

The supreme court severely restricted the use of bar fetters and condemned their generalised and indiscriminate use. Case of torture in police lock-ups and prisons are routine and endemic. The role of doctors in this is dubious. They are mainly used for cover up purposes.

Appeal to Subscribers/Readers

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