

Crime: New Dimensions

POINTS TO DEVELOP

New social dimension to crime.

New motives for crime; new type of criminals.

Reasons complicated and intertwined.

Power of money overwhelms values.

More and more young criminals, and from rich and influential classes.

Psychological imbalance and over-ambition-a major factor.

Parents to blame.

The rich and powerful, highly placed bureaucrats, and those with political clout interfere with the law: some are always above the others in law.

Criminalisation of youth in rural areas too.

Reform of society itself needed to rectify the situation.

Society prepares the crime; the criminal commits it.

–BUCKLE

Till some years ago, crime had traceable roots in greed, lust for power; today the reasons, far from being selfish, are often bizarre, drawing attention towards the social and cultural structures of the society rather than the crime itself.

Criminalisation into is a social phenomenon which has shaped and has been shaped by the society. Antiquity recorded crime as a means to acquire power, wealth or take revenge. With the emergence of society divided into classes, criminal acts depicted revolt and unrest. However, in the democratic and constitutionally bound society of the present, crime has assumed the shape of gruesome murders, quite often for trivial or no apparent reasons.

Nefarious activities like rape, robbery, kidnapping, dacoity have become means to make quick money, display power, or to revolt against the system. Worse still are crimes committed without any fear of conviction under the auspices of money and power, merely for the sake of experience, or perhaps, as an impulsive action. There is a new genre of crime with the focus shifting from the poor to the rich, from the common man to people with power, from grown-ups to the young, and from the oppressed to those possessing apparently everything in life.

Confrontations and quarrels earlier would start with arguments and mostly end with an exchange of abusive language; now, a trivial disagreement in no time at all progresses to physical injury and murder. Equally frightening is the change in the earlier notion (at least held by the majority) that crime never pays. In fact, a large share of the nation's reserves today is contributed to by those indulging in criminal activities and in turn it finds its way back into criminal activities, thus creating a vicious circle.

The intricacy of the matter means one cannot simply enlist the reasons behind the changing face of crime. The reasons are so thoroughly entwined that a single matter oscillates back and forth to reveal its associations with a host of reasons. The eroding value system, flux in economic and cultural trends, political corruption and uncertainties, an antiquated judicial system, bribery, and an array of many more reasons collectively contribute to the present scenario.

However, amongst all these, money and corruption provide the breeding ground congenial for crime. Today's society characterised by the 'money can buy anything' attitude has washed away the ethical or moral value system. Values, which have gradually diluted through the generations, have now reached a stage of irrelevance for most people. While old values have become obsolete, new values have not even begun to get shaped. Impulsive decisions based on selfish gain and benefits form the rules by which society lives.

Hard to believe and harder still to comprehend is the fact that a majority of heinous crimes are today committed by those perceived as the most innocent—the young Adolescence-typical of rebellion and rage—was never so threatening as it is today, when young criminals, operating individually or in gangs, perform organized crimes supplemented by the newest of gun technology.

A Delhi school dropout allegedly killed his friend's mother and sister after looting the house of cash and jewellery. An MBA from Mumbai squandered a brilliant academic career in trying to make quick money in crime to finance his plans to set up business. A young man was thrown out of his civil engineering institute in Bharatpur for violently beating up a senior who tried to rag him. Soon after, he formed his own gang which carried out several murders across Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The criminology department of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences has observed that the crime rate among the youth has gone up by as much as 40 per cent. The new crime wave flows across all races, classes and lifestyles, but is mainly associated with the middle class or upper middle class. The National Crime Records Bureau in one of its reports has stated that people in the 16-25 age

group are responsible for 56 per cent of all crimes committed in the country. Every day in cities rich businessmen get robbed, commuters get mugged on trains or stabbed in buses, women get raped behind tinted car windows, and jilted boyfriends throw acid on hapless girls.

The new generation has many young persons disenchanted with the world of cut-throat competition, steered by satellite TV images of the rich and famous and faced with squeezed job markets, general lack of opportunities and the tremendous pressure to succeed. Soon this tremendous pressure to succeed builds up anger. Unfulfilled ambitions to make it big constantly plays on the mind and “they suddenly find crime and brute force has a premium.” Psychiatrists observe that the troubled youth want ready success and they believe they can use any means to get it. They fall easy prey to the world of crime which tempts them with a chance of making a fast buck and the dream of a chance to become noticed among the crowd. The Columbine school incident in Colorado, USA where two teenagers massacred their classmates represents the story of dislocation and alienation in today’s times. According to their would-be victims who survived the massacre, the two did it because they felt slighted. They did not get the popularity they felt they deserved. They craved for the attention that the socially successful get in this world.

While many victimised by the pressures of society resort to crime, a few even take it up as a break from boredom. In metropolitan cities children of affluent families, clad in clothes with the tags of Versace and Armani and driving BMWs and Mercedes, roam the streets to give vent to the surplus disposable income they have and the virile energy of their youth. The thrill, the lavish lifestyles and thirst for immediate gratification often materialise in crime.

The blame undoubtedly lies, to some extent, on the New Age mantra of the upwardly mobile parents. Intent on being liberal, these parents allow their children to grow up without any restraint or curbs on behavior. Endless money and little supervision is part of the absentee parent phenomenon. The sense of guilt felt by the parents is sought to be compensated through the materialistic pleasures and unlimited freedom they give the children, without the necessary grounding in basic ethical values. Lack of communication pushes the children towards their peers from whom they gather vital information on subjects like sex, crime, and dubious ways of relieving boredom. It gives them a sense of belonging. Belonging to a gang allows even the most shy and timid to feel suave and powerful.

Many a time, parents themselves prove catalytic in pushing their children towards distorted modes of behaviour which later develop into criminal tendencies. The

arrogance of money without value prompts many a rich and influential parent to bail their children out of the reach of law, initially for petty crimes and later for serious ones. These children grow in an environment where they know that with the support of their parents they stand above the law.

In Delhi, a 13-year-old boy was caught bullying and trying to extort money from other classmates. When summoned to the school, the boy's father, a successful doctor, sided with his son saying he was "just playing the fool" and urged the authorities to forget the matter. When the principal refused to do so, the parent grew abusive and withdrew the child from the school saying the school was not 'fit' for his son.

There is a VIP culture comprising politicians, bureaucrats and high-class businessmen and executives and this 'coterie culture' has added to the degradation of social values. Once sporadic, incidents of VIPs' children being involved in criminal cases have multiplied by the hundreds and go to show how law and justice have come to be differently interpreted for the rich and affluent as against the masses.

The Jessica Lal murder case as well as the Priyadarshini Mattoo rape and murder case got no justice for the victims because the culprits were well-attached. In Lucknow, the son of a police officer and two youths allegedly shot dead a salesman of an ice-cream parlour just because the latter was unable to serve them a certain flavour of ice-cream. One of the accomplices was a relative of a mafia-turned politician.

Politicians themselves make headlines in scams whether they involve guns or fodder. As one psychologist with reference to the increase in crime rates by children of the affluent says, "the manipulation of the system is not seen as a legal or social breach but as an index of smartness. For politicians it is a display of authority and power when they manage to live lives of ease with terminally delayed court cases."

The two main factors that contribute to the formation of such a system is the instability in politics and the incompetent law agencies vulnerable to the influences of wealth and position. In times when governments are at the mercy of child-like whims and tantrums of politicians, the scene is grim, offering no hope to the people. Acquiring seats of power for personal gain is a common phenomenon today.

Criminalisation of politics, as noticeable today, has also contributed to the change in thinking patterns of the masses. The disappointment of the people at the dismal situation of politics is reflected in their taking a defiant attitude towards

law. The misuse of power by the so-called leaders results in the inevitable question by the masses: if they can, why can't we?

Accompanying the VIPs is the miniscule elite class intoxicated by the cocktail of power and money. Their power is constituted of their connections with the influential people-political and bureaucratic, the last including highly placed law officers. There is a rising tendency among such people towards flaunting their VIP connections, displaying their wealth and showing a supreme contempt for social and legal norms. Their lifestyles which ape those of the West, hyped by the media, have become definitions of progress in life. The recklessness of their lifestyles often culminates in molestations, brawls and shoot-outs in five-star hotels and discotheques and 'exclusive' joints like the Tamarind Court.

The picture of criminalisation in cities is gloomy enough, but the villages and rural areas offer no respite. In villages, terrorism and bloodshed have replaced dacoity with the increase in strife among tribal or caste factions. Women are often the hapless Victims in the circumstances, raped and molested by local bigwigs and their kin. Political nexus and local gundas serving the affluent as their bodyguards make the rural VIPs nothing less than 'feudal socialist' kings. Understaffed police stations with officials recruited at meagre salaries are under the thumbs of VIPs and easily succumb to the various pressures. Illiteracy and poverty further exacerbate the situation making democracy a farce in the villages. Politicians, contrary to their traditional roles, become accomplices in scams and yet manage to procure their seats of power.

What of the law? The machinery supposed to put a curb on it all? Far from serving the intended purpose, the judiciary and law are crippled by bribery, corruption, manipulations and the legal loopholes well known to the criminals. The conviction rate is abysmal. Fear of the law has almost ceased to exist, especially among the moneyed class and those wielding power. The interference in legal proceedings by the VIPs incapacitates even the honest among the officials who are often victimised and transferred as 'punishment' for trying to do their work.

Antiquated laws coupled with easy accessibility of fabricated evidence and witnesses make the common man avoid the very law which is supposedly his only resort to justice. What is more, in most cases witnesses turn hostile under pressure of threat or inducement, and frustrate the process of law. Crime dossiers and fingerprint banks, foundations of detection, are manipulated to suit personal needs. Paying off the police officials and employing VIP connections are readymade options to obtain bail and release orders.

What then is the solution? There seems to be no “possible solution in sight. The truth of the matter, difficult to acknowledge, is that the real faultlines to rectify lie within the society itself. The efforts needed are required to come from all classes and departments. The government needs to step up the battle against criminalisation in all strata of life and sincerely work out ways of distributing wealth more equitably. More money needs to be poured into education and towards creating more opportunities for the poor and the young. And most of all, education and responsibility need to be drilled into the new generation by the parents. The values of today’s youth are merely the concentrated reflections of those of the elders. Youngsters need to be told that the society is their responsibility, and that it cares for them.

We all have to make an effort to discover all over again values like kindness, respect for another, and tolerance. These may sound nauseatingly repetitive, even mundane and obsolescent in today’s context. But these are the only ingredients of peace and survival.