

## **Criminal Gangs & Organized Crime: A Perspective of Mumbai Mega Metropolis**

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### **Abstract**

Crime and the city of Mumbai go hand in hand. You cannot separate the essence of Criminal activities from an ever expanding financial capital of the country and also a mega metropolis. Criminal gangs have been operating in India since many decades ago. Since the Pre-Independence Era to the more recent & popular criminal grouping including the dacoits of the Chambal region, several gangs used to operate in the States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh.

Organised crime in contemporary India is a more complex issue. In the modern urban world, the gap between aspiration and fulfillment is widening. In India, the typical socio-political circumstances prevailing since Independence and the advent of democracy provide the logical context of the strengthening of these trends. The fact that the Constitution of India aimed at achieving socio-economic equality in a popular, nebulous and pluralistic democracy has generated processes favoring the creation of greater political legitimacy for various patterns of deviance and crime. An upsurge in economic crimes includes a variety of financial scams, tax evasion and money laundering.

### **Introduction**

Liberalization and globalization of the economy allowed a free flow of foreign goods and capital into the country, and the dramatic growth in computerization and e-business that followed have led to the emergence of cyber-crime.

Many of the schemes introduced to boost the country's foreign exchange reserves were open to manipulation. This is best illustrated by the Value Based Advance License (VABAL) scheme, where up to 60 per cent of the value of exports was allowed at zero import duty and with no income tax on the foreign exchange earnings. This led to the *hawala* (illegal money transfer system) racket, where unscrupulous exporters started obtaining export license on the strength of bogus export orders, and made huge profit by arranging foreign remittances through *hawala* channels. M.N. Singh estimates that total *hawala* transactions in the country stood at Rs. 305 billion a year in 1994. This currency flight continues to be a lucrative underworld operation.

Various legislative initiatives have also given rise to other patterns of organised crime. In keeping with the spirit of the Directive Principles of the State Policy enshrined in the Constitution, many laws were enacted to remove social inequalities and evils, and to reduce economic disparities. Restrictions imposed on the consumption of alcohol gave rise to bootlegging activities in the States of Maharashtra and Gujarat. The Prohibition Law of 1949 in Mumbai gave rise to a lucrative clandestine trade in illicit liquor. In a city like Mumbai, where the price of alcohol is understandably high, bootlegging becomes a thriving business in

the black-market and this was followed by the evolution of the popular illegal gambling system called *Matka*.

As the financial capital of India, Mumbai has long been the playground of several criminal gangs and their continuing warfare for dominance. The first systematic study of organised crime was conducted by V.K. Saraf, Commissioner of Police (Retd), Mumbai City, 1995, in which he traced the origin of organised criminal gangs in the city, their criminal activities and the inter-gang warfare. He also highlighted the main characteristics of the Mumbai gangs.

After Independence, due to the prohibition policy adopted by the Government of Maharashtra, bootlegging or trade in illicit liquor became a lucrative business for criminal gangs. They made considerable sums of money by supplying illicit liquor to the local citizenry. Their activities also extended to the neighboring State of Gujarat, which was declared 'dry' at the time of Independence and continues to be so till date.

Varadarajan Mudaliar, who started as a porter at the CST Railway station, took to committing theft at the Mumbai Docks and later graduated to bootlegging in the early nineteen sixties. He amassed considerable wealth through such activities and also subverted the law enforcement system considerably. In the mid nineteen eighties, he became so influential that he used to hold *durbars* (conclaves) in his area of influence to settle disputes.

Similarly, Haji Mastan and Yusuf Patel began as small-scale criminals and later took to smuggling gold and silver. They made a lot of money and invested it in 'legitimate' business ventures, primarily construction and real estate. Haji Mastan made an attempt on Yusuf Patel's life in the nineteen seventies due to business rivalry but the latter survived. This was the beginning of the gang warfare in Mumbai, which continues unabated to date and has claimed hundreds of lives.

### **The Dawood Ibrahim Gang**

Dawood Ibrahim is the most powerful Mumbai Mafia 'don', or 'bhai' with a countrywide network and extensive linkages abroad. He is one of the most powerful gangsters involved in transnational crimes, including narcotics smuggling, extortion and contract killing. He has lived in Dubai and is currently based in Pakistan. He had a phenomenal rise within a short time. The son of Ibrahim Kaskar, a former Criminal Investigation Department (CID) constable, he started off as a petty criminal and had the sympathies of Bombay (now Mumbai) Police due to his father's connections. He used to assist smugglers to recover money from those who did not keep up their 'word'. In the nineteen seventies, other gangs had become relatively weak and he took advantage of the vacuum, taking up smuggling of gold and silver. He built up his criminal empire with the help of his brothers and close associates, and was responsible for the elimination of hundreds of criminals belonging to rival gangs. The liberal bail policy pronounced by the Supreme Court helped him consolidate his gang. In the nineteen eighties, he became the most feared gangster of Mumbai. However, fearing for his life at the hands of rival gangs, he fled to Dubai, though his criminal network remained virtually intact. He currently controls his gang's operations with complete impunity, as there is no extradition treaty between India and Dubai or Pakistan, and authorities in these countries have refused to extradite him – and, indeed, deny his presence

on their soil despite overwhelming evidence. He also attempted to win social respectability by playing host to many influential politicians and film stars in Dubai.

Dawood's brother Anees Ibrahim looks after the smuggling, narcotics trafficking and contract killing operations. Another key associate, Noora, looks after film financing and extortion from film personalities. Iqbal, a low profile operative, looks after his 'legitimate' business activities, including trading in the share markets of Hong Kong. His gang consists of about 4,000 to 5,000 men. Fifty per cent of the Dawood gang members hail from Mumbai and the neighboring districts and 25 per cent, including Abu Salem, his close lieutenant, hail from the State of Uttar Pradesh.

Dawood Ibrahim has also invested heavily in 'legitimate' business ventures. His brother Anees owns a trading company in Dubai and Dawood has invested approximately Rs. 20 crores in a Shopping Centre in Mumbai and is also reported to have financial stakes in swanky Hotel in Mumbai. Noora runs a Travel agency in Mumbai, which has since come under severe enforcement pressure. Dawood also reportedly has huge financial stakes in East West Airlines. His 'legitimate' business empire is estimated to have a turnover of approximately Rs.2,000 crores a year.

Dawood's gang was secular in character before the year 1993 and used to attract 'volunteers' from both the Hindu and Muslim communities. However, after his involvement in the serial blasts in 1993, most of the Hindu gangsters have parted company from him.

The Chhota Shakeel gang initially used to be a wing of Dawood Ibrahim's 'D Company'. Currently operating as an independent gang, though not in dispute with the Dawood gang, it is active in the south, central and north-west areas of Mumbai.

### **Chota Rajan Gang**

Chota Rajan commenced his criminal career with the Dawood Ibrahim gang. Hailing from Mumbai's eastern suburb of Chembur, he started out with extortion rackets centered on the Sahyadri Krida Mandal, which organises the annual Ganesh festival at Tilak Nagar. Subsequent to the 1993 serial blasts in Mumbai, Dawood's gang was divided on communal lines and Chota Rajan fell out with Dawood and fled from India. He raised a new gang in 1994-95. According to an estimate, the membership of this gang numbers about 800. His areas of operation are in the States of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. He is essentially a drug-trafficker and contract killer. He joined hands with Arun Gawli and was responsible for the killing of Sunil Samant, a trusted lieutenant of Dawood Ibrahim, in Dubai in 1995. It was a retaliatory killing. He has targeted many Dawood loyalists and his gang has also suffered in retaliatory actions.

### **Arun Gawli Gang**

After the death of Ramya Naik, the mantle of leadership of his gang fell on the shoulders of Arun Gawli. There have been several inter-gang killings against the Dawood gang, and they have also targeted each other's political and economic interests. This gang consists of about 2000 to 3000 persons. Interestingly, Arun Gawli was sent to prison in 1990 and even though he was granted bail by the Courts, he chose to remain in jail primarily to escape the wrath of

the Dawood gang. He continued to run his criminal empire from within the jail premises by passing instructions through his visitors. His gang is involved in the collection of protection money from rich businessmen and also contract killings. He came out of prison and started a political party, the Akhil Bhartiya Sena. He has been sent back to jail for his alleged involvement in a contract killing case. Arun Gawli is politically very active and has considerable influence in the slum areas of Mumbai. He even posed a significant political challenge to the dominant Shiv Sena party in the State of Maharashtra.

### **Amar Naik Gang**

This gang originated in the year 1980 and commenced with the collection of protection money from various vegetable vendors in the Dadar area of Mumbai city. When Ram Bhat, the leader of this gang was sentenced to imprisonment in a robbery case, Amar Naik took over the reins. The main thrust of his criminal activities was to collect *hafta* (extortion money) from vegetable vendors, hawkers, bootleggers and smugglers. Due to a clash of interests, his gang had several violent skirmishes with the Arun Gawli gang, not only outside jail but even within the jail premises, where members of both the gangs were lodged, resulting in several killings. This gang has strength of about 200 criminals. Amar Naik was killed on August 9, 1996, and the mantle of leadership has now fallen on the shoulders of Ashwin Naik, his younger brother, an engineer by profession.

### **Characteristics of Mumbai Gangs**

Based on the study of the Mumbai underworld, V.K. Saraf developed the following profile of membership and activities:

- ❖ 66.5 per cent of gangsters in his sample were in the age group of 19-28 years; 26 per cent in the 29 to 38 years category; and 6.5 per cent were above 40 years.
- ❖ 29 per cent studied up to primary school, 42.5 per cent up to secondary school and 5 per cent had college education.
- ❖ Majorities were drawn from a poor economic background and was propelled into the world of crime due to economic difficulties.
- ❖ A majority of the gangsters hailed from outside Mumbai and approximately 30 per cent came from outside the State of Maharashtra.
- ❖ The gangs were not based on region or religion, but after the 1993 serial blasts, Hindu gangsters have largely disassociated themselves from the Dawood Ibrahim gang.
- ❖ A typical Mumbai gangster is a cool-headed schemer and ruthless and un-hesitatingly employs terrorist tactics when he perceives his interest is being jeopardized. He is prone to violence at the slightest provocation.
- ❖ There is no initiation ceremony or ritual for the members. However, a 'hopeful' is involved in a criminal situation to test his mental capacity.
- ❖ The gang leaders have a caring attitude towards the members. The families are well looked after by the leadership when the members are killed or are in jail.
- ❖ A gang leader is not a total autocrat. He consults experienced people in the gang.
- ❖ There is evidence of a loose confederation of gangsters. A smaller gang may merge into a bigger gang but does not lose its identity completely. The smaller gang carries out the decisions of the main gang but is left free to involve itself in any activities of its choice so long as it does not clash with the interests of the main gang.

- ❖ The gangsters are required to display unflinching loyalty to the boss. Lack of loyalty means death.
- ❖ The gangsters are divided into three categories, namely, sharp shooters, money collectors and liaison agents. The liaison agents deal with lawyers and law enforcement officials and assist in legal problems relating to incarcerated gangsters. Each gang has a certain number of auxiliary members. They have a history of being involved in criminal activity and generally provide shelter to the gangsters and act as a repository for weapons. Their premises are used for holding meetings and making telephone calls by the gangsters.

### **Looking Ahead**

If the need to deal with cases of organised crime differently and as a distinct category is accepted, an effective response would be to enact a separate Organised Crime Code rather than making patchwork amendments to the IPC. The existing laws of extradition have also been of little help. Certain fugitives like Anis Kaskar, Dawood Ibrahim, Tiger Memon, Chhota Rajan, etc, wanted for serious offences in India, have been living in various countries abroad and our law enforcers are totally helpless.

Merely enacting special laws is, however, not adequate. Police and other investigating agencies should not be lulled into inaction till a special law is enacted, or after such a law is in place, but should vigorously pursue investigation. We need to develop specialized infrastructure for investigation and prosecution of such crimes. Stricter control on possession of illegal firearms and explosives, and also provisions for enhanced punishment for those found in possession of ordnance type of bombs/hand grenades, explosives like RDX, etc, are needed. The criminal-intelligence system also needs to be immensely strengthened.

As one of the essential features of organised crime is its determined effort at subverting the police, administrative, political and judicial systems, those who collaborate with organised crime need to be severely dealt with under law. Such compromised elements need to be taken out of the system.

### **Role of Media and Community Awareness**

Mass Media, both print and electronic, can play a significant role in leading an awareness programme against organised crime. As has been the trend in the present era, commercialization has engulfed all spheres of life including the media. The glorification of crime through the media is the dominant trend, and this creates an illusion of a certain glamorous life style that does not exist in reality. The media can play an important role in portraying a real picture of the phenomenon and also attempt to build trust between the police and citizenry. Indeed, the media could play an effective role in creating awareness about the severity of organised criminal activity. A large number of people living in different areas of Mumbai city, such as Nagpada, Agripada, Kurla, Chembur, Bhandi Bazar, etc., have expressed their dissatisfaction with the present situation, stating that liaison between the police and public is a myth. Specifically, in the slum areas, people directly blame the police for indulging in extortion, reportedly not even spare petty shopkeepers. At the other end, a large number of lower-rank police personnel state that people living in such areas support and encourage criminality and even provide shelter to many gangsters, creating a mystique

around them as 'bhai', and harbouring hopes that they would themselves be leaders of the locality in future. If organised crime is to be curbed in the city, it is imperative that the citizenry be involved in its prevention, and that public opinion is built up against such crimes. In this complex process, the media can act as a catalyst, because it has the strength and influence to reach out to people and to create mass awareness.

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