



POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE

The Future of Personal Security

Here are some possible headlines and cover stories from the next decade:



1. Teenage gang wars in a posh New Delhi school results in the shooting of a class of pre-teen students. Five children died and ten are seriously injured, undergoing treatment in hospital. Psychiatrists blame excessive wealth and poverty of values for the incident.
2. The badlands of Bihar have now enveloped the whole country. Ordinary citizens have taken to arming themselves with knives and guns while travelling by car. Car manufacturers have developed special electronic locks which can't be opened by violent mobs.
3. Self defence methods – from karate to judo classes to pepper sprays are seeing unprecedented growth, as a scared urban middle class learns to protect itself.
4. While there are security men patrolling buildings and neighbourhoods, home owners have installed electronic security systems as well, not just in affluent areas but in middle class residential colonies too. Sales of electronic security devices are booming in a marked shift from human only security to combination security.
5. The public issue of Securitas Inc stocks is a major sell out. Their claim to fame – development of a low cost yet extremely effective device for individuals to protect themselves enough to escape from mob violence.



6. Insurance firms are reporting record sales of all types of protection policies. A large consumer research commissioned by the insurance industry reveals a shift in mindset from apathy and resignation to disasters to a proactive and self-protective stance as the key reason underpinning the growth. A growing urban middle class with small families begins to accord greater value to their life and possessions than ever before in the past.

The growth of gun culture, electronic security, a focus on personal self-defence led by fear – all that is alien to most of India at the present time (exception being the bad lands of Bihar and eastern UP), lie well within the realm of possibility in the next decade.



This is because we already live in a more violent society today than we did in the past few decades. The upward spiral of escalating violence is visible everywhere – in rising crime rates across the board, road rage and incidents of mob violence. Levels of aggression have risen, with the consequent decline in civility. Vigilante justice and trial by media have stepped in to fill in the gaps in the functioning of the criminal justice system.

Urban India was never so crime free that people could leave their door key under the flower pot or mat, but today the anxiety about crime and threat to life and property has gone up tenfold compared to the past. Indeed it seems as if the previous decades were a kinder, gentler era which has now definitely passed. Society seems to have moved to a state of being governed by the law of the jungle (might is right) than by the rule of law.



As the next decade unfurls, what are the changing contours of the security landscape that we can expect to see? And what will this mean for people at an individual and collective level? What sorts of opportunities does it throw up for the security industry to offer individual and collective solutions? And what can we expect from the State itself towards ensuring law and order? These are the futures questions of interest to us as citizens and marketers. In order to get the long view, we can start by examining the driving forces at work through the various layers of society and their likely impact on the escalation or containment of violence.

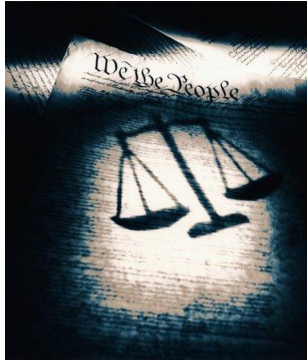
There are a whole range of forces at work, driving the escalation of violence in our society today.

The foremost force is democracy, in transferring power to the lowest classes of Indian society. At one level a great achievement of democracy has been the overturning of centuries old power structures and the resultant empowerment of the masses. However the result of this has also been the gradual replacement of the rule of law with the rule of the jungle (might is right). The lower classes and castes in India have always been oppressed by the more powerful and their lived reality on a daily basis gives greater primacy to hierarchy and the authority of the powerful than to the rule of law. As they have become the political masters of the nation, no wonder it is this mindset that they bring to bear on their decisions and actions.



Robert Lingat, a leading authority on ancient Hindu law has this to say in contrasting the principles of western legal systems with those that prevailed in ancient and medieval India.

“Western judicial systems are based on the concept of legality. The law is understood to express the will of all. The laws’ imperative force resides entirely in the popular will or constitutionally established authority which has sanctioned it, and in the power of usage or custom which lies behind, and has in a sense given birth to that law. What is “just” within the meaning of western judicial systems is that which is “legal” i.e., that which confirms to law. What is unjust, and thus irregular and reprehensible, is that which is illegal, i.e., contrary to law i.e. an actual provision of the law.



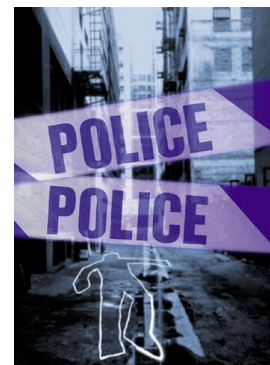
It is a system which fits an egalitarian and individualistic society. The rule of law is established at the very level of the relations it purports to govern. It starts with individuals and it is a manifestation of their own picture of the social order.

The closest equivalent to this conception of social relations and law in ancient and medieval India lie in the srenis and kulas. They had the freedom to determine their own rules and regulations which were binding on members. This is of course not legislation in the proper sense of the word however as the laws did not apply to the population at large.

The classical legal system of India substitutes the notion of authority for that of legality. In ancient times the authority resided in the revealed texts – the Dharma shastras, Shrutis and Smritis. In medieval times, authority in matters of law and order shifted to the King.”



We should not be surprised therefore, that as political power has transferred to the lower classes, the mindset of obedience to absolute authority only - has taken over from the imported transplant of allegiance to laws agreed upon and passed by men. Widespread corruption and the resultant criminalisation of politics have only solidified the hold of goonda raaj or jungle law in governance, while still paying lip service to the constitution and parliamentary legislation.



The growth of democracy, the rise of corruption and criminalisation of politics has in recent times been compounded by the breakdown of the criminal justice system and the consequent weakening of the State in enforcing law and order among the population. Vigilante justice and trial by media are new phenomena that have stepped in to fill the gap. The constant unearthing and reporting of crime by the television media in a strange twist, fuels greater criminality and violence by a process of emulation.

Finally, social values and attitudes have hardened, moving towards greater intolerance and aggression. There is the religious extremism of both Islamist and Hindutva varieties. The worship of money power actively encourages the pursuit of individual gain and social Darwinism (survival of the fittest mentality). The ascendancy of “youth” power vis-à-vis the older generation means there is less and less willingness to bow down to the decisions of the elders in resolving disputes.

There is greater suspicion and lack of trust between rich and poor, upper and lower caste, members of different religions leading to greater ghetto-ization of cities and towns.



All of these driving forces and trends taken together, point to escalation of violence in the next decade and more. We could easily reach the levels of security threats and danger and vigilantism that South Africa and Latin America experience today. Given the greater faith in the private sector, industry and market forces that exists today, we should expect people to respond by seeking solutions at a personal level through shopping for products and services.

There are a set of counter forces visible which could lead to containment of violence and a move towards greater peace, law and order. These include all current and proposed steps to empower civil society – ranging from anti-corruption movements such as the RTI Act, electoral reform, an activist Supreme Court, reform of the criminal justice system as per the Malimath Committee recommendations etc. They also include the re-assertion of higher moral and spiritual forces as a counter to the all pervasive economic logic that prevails today.



However at present, the forces of peace collectively seem weaker and possessing of lesser momentum than the forces of aggression. Perhaps we as a society need to see violence peak and receive a rude shock such as the slowing of economic growth itself, for the forces of peace to awaken, gain momentum and reassert them selves. Meanwhile, karate classes and pepper sprays look good.

