

Private Security Guards In India: The Paradox of A Booming Industry and Burden of A Low Status Occupation

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ABSTRACT

The private security industry has experienced a visible leap in the after of economic reforms in India carried out during the early 1990s, There is exploding demand for security services both by industries and corporate sectors, communities. Government's inability to provide safety at each micro level through police forces has created an opportunity for private players to undertake business operation in security services. The private security sector now is the second largest employment generator in the country. However, there is a antagonistic side of this industry too. This sector has remained grossly informal which has a direct bearing on the people employed as security personal. The statutory welfare scheme prevalent to protect the interest of security personnel could hardly be implemented. As such, there is a growing concern that the growth private industry could not improve the plight of the security personnel. This paper attempts to examine the status of the of workforce i.e. Private security guards in this booming industrial sector.

Keywords: Private Security, Guards, chowkidar, security personnel

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Chowkidar' has become the latest hot buzzword in Indian politics. The prime minister Narendra Modi has labeled himself as 'chowkidar', and attached his ministers, colleagues, party workers, supporters with the appellation as an electioneering counter strategy. Apparently, the prime minister is assuring the countrymen that the nation is at a shield against any damage, harm or wrong doing, and is in safe-hand with him as the helm of country's democratic ruler. But how are our chowkidars in real-world fiefdom?

Chowkidar in ordinary parlance means a watchman or a gatekeeper. Gate-keeping, in the eyes of public, is generally perceived to be a petty-job devoid of any skills or cognition. Working as a watchman has always remained a low status occupation. With growing complexity of societies, watchman has transcended to 'security guard' or even to a higher level called 'security personnel'. Today, Chowkidar as 'security guard' has multiple duties with wider areas of operation.

Private security service is a highly organized industry in USA and across Europe. The private security personnel are not mere guards. They are dubbed as security officers in those societies. With the transformation of the title from security guards to security personnel or officer, not only the nomenclature for people doing for private security duty has changed rather the complete set of duties as well as the arena too has made a great shift. So does has changed the perception towards the people engaged private security service there. Globally a good amount of literature exists on private security services particularly in the context of USA. These academic works highlight the services provided by private security industry in different spheres of society and economy, the roles, functions, responsibility of private security personnel as alternative as well as complementary to national police forces. In India, different FICCI publications focus on growing need of private security as a service, as business opportunity, as revenue generator for state exchequer, as avenues for employment for rural masses and people below poverty line.

The increasing demand for security and safety has created a whirlpool for the private security services in India too, and as such, the private security service industry has grown tremendously during the last two decades or more in this country. However, could the boom in private security industry really transform the plight of the people working as security guards in this sector in India? That remains a neglected question.

The paper is an effort to examine and address the question through the existing literatures in the context of India.

PRIVATE SECURITY SERVICE SECTOR IN INDIA

Excellent economic growth, speedy urbanization, development of industries and infrastructure facilities in the aftermath of economic reforms has intensified the need for security arrangements in the country. Demand for safety and protection of assets is on the rise not only from booming corporate sector such as: at office buildings, business/commercial complexes, industrial establishments, public utilities, institutions and other locations but also from burgeoning middle classes residing at housing societies and residential apartments. However, *delivery of police services at such micro-level is not feasible, and will put unprecedented burden on the state exchequer (FICCI 2005). The traditional policing, as such, has restricted itself to large causes - serving the law and order function through enforcement. With the scarcity of state policing to provide satisfactory level of safety and protection to different spheres of personal and community life, paid private security service is demanded for control of unauthorized intrusion, and protection of life/people, property and facilities against theft, crimes, destruction, fire, emergencies, accidents, any real/perceived threat or unwanted incidents through use of security forces in urbanized industrial societies (Fischer et al 2004, Dempsey 2011, Nemeth, 2018, FICCI 2017). Such demand has created opportunity for mushrooming of business enterprises, and motive for profit in the field of security services extending to different sphere of private commercial and community life which, otherwise, are not provided by public police.*

Private security industry in India has experienced a tremendous leap, and emerged as a sunrise sector. The sector has increased at Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 20 percent over the last decade with a market size estimated at INR 57,000 Crore. With 8.9 million employees, the private security industry is the second largest employment generator, the largest employment provider being the agriculture sector in the country. The private security sector also has the unequalled distinction of being the largest corporate tax contributor to the treasury. Private security services are also subjected to goods and service tax (GST) rate of 18% (FICCI¹ 2015, FICCI 2018). Such information talks volumes of the significance of this industry in Indian economy.

FUNCTIONS OF PRIVATE SECURITY PERSONNEL

Private security is indispensable to urbanized industrial societies - ensuring safety and security of individuals, and property including intellectual property and sensitive corporate information. In developed societies like USA, functions of private security personnel go beyond manned guarding. *Private security personnel, usually in uniform and sometimes armed are engaged in activities which include services such as: crime prevention, enforcement of rules, investigation, patrol, lie detection, alarm, and armored transportation, protection against additional threats including waste, accident, fire, theft, vandalism and unethical practice (Kakalik et al 1971, Hess 2009, Bottom et al 1983). This industry has expanded itself to industrial and manufacturing set-ups, public utilities, health and education facilities, and many government institutional and critical infrastructure system (Strom et al 2010).*

However, unlike other developed countries where private security services have extended to critical areas, private security operators in India are still engaged in non-critical sectors. Critical public utilities, large scale events, high profile individuals' security are largely managed by the public police (FICCI 2005, FICCI 2015). Though security personnel's job tasks, beneficiaries, areas of operation varies yet the duties assumed by private security personnel are non-enforcement and non-police function in India. Private security service companies in India are engaged per-dominantly in manned guarding but are not allowed to procure armed license, and hence have to rely on guards who have procured license themselves (FICCI 2013).

FICCI (2015, 2017 and 2018) has divided this industry into three major segments such as:

¹ Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry

- i. manned guarding : in which guarding service is provided in clients' premises in-order to restrict the unauthorized access or movement, and also to shield the property against destruction and damage etc.,
- ii. cash service management: which is responsible for safe transit of cash in the banking network
- iii. allied services segment : which is meant for event management say crowd control and VIP protection etc, and security guard training services

Manned guarding, pertaining to the provision of manpower for the protection of premises and people, is the largest constituent in security service industry. It generates maximum employment, and absorbs for nearly 75 percent of the security service industry. Activities within the domain of manned guarding includes surveillance and protection at residents, Information Technology or Information Technology Enabled Services hubs, retail establishment, commercial, manufacturing, and infrastructure facilities. 41 percent of the manned guarding services are utilized in the commercial and 39 percent in the residential sector. Metropolis such as: New Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, as well as major cities like Lucknow, Pune, Chandigarh,, Ahmedabad and Jaipur etc account for 70 percent of the residential sector demand for manned guarding (*FICCI 2013, FICCI 2018*).

THE SAD STORY OF PRIVATE SECURITY GUARDS IN INDIA

Private security industry has played a pivotal role for providing employment by attracting the poverty-ridden youths from informal rural and semi-urban areas. Baring cash service management which has transformed to a more professional service system owing to high level of security concerns associated with operations in its area; the private security industry, as whole, in spite of having tremendous potential, has predominantly been inflicted with substantial informality. 60 per cent of the security service suppliers still operates unorganized, and 90 percent of the work-force is employed in manned guarding (*FICCI 2018*).

This sector has been characterized by low cost-operations, and presence of extreme employee exploitation. Private security guards are entrapped in excessive work hour, low wages, poor work condition, absence of holidays and lack of provisions for leave, want of promotional opportunities, unfair treatment, discrimination and uncertainty about retaining jobs (*Upadhyay 2011*). Being classified as unskilled workers, the guards are stuck in an occupation where there is little potentiality of a permanent position or upward mobility. Lack of training and education among the workforce, absence of employee welfare, non-compliance of social security provisions and benefits such as minimum wage, provident fund, and enrollment in employee's insurance are visibly present (*FICCI 2017, FICCI 2018*).

With such antagonistic forces in operation, there is a growing feeling among the researchers, that private security has not assumed the position of a respectable profession, and this sector has not matured enough to be an attractive destination among the employment seekers.

Vyas (2016) traces presence of elderly migrant workforce, and growing contractualization in private security provision industry. This is largely due to failure of the state as a regulator and provider of social security protection. Her study found that the plight of the workers is shaped by factors that go beyond work and wage-income. Factors such as their living conditions, inability to cope with urgent needs including ailment or death, atomized lives in the city, and lack of accessibility to quality welfare services forces these people and their families in precarious conditions.

Noronha et al (2018) who studied workplace dynamics in the context of private security guards and found that these security guards were deployed as contract labour, and their jobs were marked by easy access, low status, lack of respect, and precariousness. Loss of dignity in private security has been reasoned to non-entitlements, and opportunity to reclaim dignity among the security personnel was linked to employer's (suppliers' of private security service) adherence to legal regulations.

CONCLUSION

The private security industry has grown rapidly in growth oriented India, and possess tremendous potential in generating employment. The published works on private security industry paint an extremely pale picture of the plight of the work-force especially those engaged in manned guarding. As such, the occupation has not become an attractive option for employment. It has rather remained a compulsion for many those who desperately seeks a living rather remaining unemployed.

Though the industry has been credited with for shifting a considerable number of workforce from an overcrowded informal sector to private security industry, and has bloomed as a big employment generator, the sector itself remains overwhelmingly unorganized. The plight of the workforce has not improved much. With informality and lack of entitlements, private security service is widely considered a low status occupation coupled with lack of respect and negative perception of the public towards caliber the security personnel. Access to entitlements directly affects the dignity derived of an occupation. Inability to have access to the social benefits by the personnel is believed to worsen their position, and cause loss of dignity.

It is a fact that the regulatory frame-work with respect to employees welfare and social security benefits are prevalent in private security industry in India, yet, there is rampant non-adherence to these regulations which in turn directly affects the well-being of the security personnel. The missing-link, here, is effective implementation of rules and regulations. The challenges that private security industry face now is how it can be regulated, and formalized in the times to come. Employee welfare measures pertaining to private security guards as employees such as: adherence of minimum wage, training statutory working hours, provisions of leave and holidays, provident fund and other security measures must be provided through state initiatives. Such benevolent measures and entitlements can uplift the status of private security guards, and changes people's perception about them too. Otherwise, the industry may grow and flourish, but miseries of the security guards who are the real heroes in this sector will pull it back.

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