

Right to Protection- A Fundamental Responsibility & Failure of the Indian State

By- Vikram, Kona

Introduction: Nearly a year has passed since terror struck Mumbai on that fateful day, 26/11/08, in the form of AK-47 wielding terrorists. Nearly two hundred people were killed; hundreds were wounded, thousands of lives were scarred forever, and our nation was shocked into outrage. Since then, little has been accomplished. A great majority of us have accepted the tragedy, relegated it into the deeper layers of memory, and moved on with life: Trial of the lone terrorist captured continues, India and Pakistan trade voluminous accusations, and none of the masterminds behind the attacks are arrested or brought to justice. However, terrorism is just one form of violent crime that afflicts our society. Violent crimes threaten us everyday in various forms. This essay attempts to explain the impact of violent crimes on important human rights. It is, in a sense, a history of failure of the state in protecting the citizenry, where the ways and means of empowering the citizens and the role of firearms in self-protection have been denied by measures of arbitrary and irrational gun control. This essay highlights the need for reforms in firearms licensing regime in India and offers a practical solution to mitigate the real and potential damage to our society from violent crimes in a practical manner.

Are you protected?: The fundamental reason why we humans live in a State is for protection of our rights, firstly to our right to live and then our property and other liberties. We naturally assume that the government machinery with all the police, paramilitary, and military forces at its disposal is there to protect us, and therefore **will** protect us at all times and from all quarters. The underlying belief is that the State alone, not the individual, possesses the specialised skill (an ability), and the responsibility (a duty), and the right to perform this task. But, are we actually protected, and more importantly, do we feel protected? Let us examine a few facts. Keeping with the scope of this essay, I shall only deal with violent crimes that endanger our lives and property.

After we became Independent in 1947, we made great strides as a society, and achieved spectacular results in many fields. All around governance improved and as a result crimes should have gone down. But is this what really happened? No, it is not! Consider this data collected by the National Crime Records Bureau, a body of the Ministry of Home Affairs:

Trends in crimes from 1953 to 2007¹

- Increase in Murders: 229.7%
- Increase in Rapes : 733.8%
- Increase in Kidnapping & abduction: 423.9%
- Riots: 191.9%
- Increase in other cognizable crimes:230.5%

¹ <http://ncrb.nic.in/cii2007/cii-2007/Snapshots%201953-2007.pdf>

If there was a slight decline in dacoities & robberies as a percentage, nearly **3,76,261** of them took place in the year 2007 alone.²

Some assume that most violent crimes take place only in rural areas, but that is not correct. Almost all the 35 major cities in India have higher crime rates than the state they are part of, with Delhi also being the rape capital of the country³. Also, these are only the reported and recorded numbers. Crime rates become frighteningly high, when unreported crimes are added.

State of Policing in India: No disrespect is meant to the men and women in Khaki and those who try to serve and protect the people to the best of their abilities. However, logistically they simply are not in a position to provide security to the nearly 1.2 billion citizens of India. With just 0.956207 police personnel per 1,000 people, we have one of the lowest proportions of police to population in the world. When the Armed Reserve Police and other similar forces are taken out of consideration, the proportion plummets even more alarmingly.⁴

When one considers the lack of training, equipment, resources (at this moment there are some 113,000 sanctioned positions for the post of beat constable that are unfilled.), along with corruption, excessive interference by politicians, and bureaucratic hindrances etc., the standards of service drastically change for the worse.

For example, according to the Times of India article, your chance of being the victim of a violent crime is 200% (you are reading it correctly) higher if you live in the jurisdiction of a particular police station in the same city.⁵

If you think that all of these numbers and statistics do not have any bearing upon your life, please consider these scenarios: You are a call centre employee returning home in the middle of the night and are attacked by muggers, or you are a retired pensioner and armed dacoits break into your house. Perhaps, you are a housewife, alone with young children, and accosted by opportunistic malefactors, or you are, a businessman and a gang of robbers wants to rid you off your life long savings. You could be a parent of a darling child, whom someone wanted to kidnap right in front of your eyes for ransom, or you are a young girl in danger of a violent rape. The list of violent dangers that befall many across India is endless, and the chances of protection if such crimes are attempted against you are very limited.

Please take a look at this interesting statistic: Even in USA, one of the most advanced countries in the world, in nearly 50% of incidents involving violent crimes, the police take more than 10 minutes to reach a potential crime spot after a report is received.⁶

² http://ncrb.nic.in/cii2007/cii-2007/FIGURES_2007.pdf

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_in_India

⁴ http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/cr_i_pol_percap-crime-police-per-capita

⁵ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/2112978483.cms>

⁶ <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cvus/current/cv06107.pdf>

The joke in circulation in US is: “Call for a cop, call for an ambulance, and call for a pizza. See who turns up first.”

What is the typical response time by the police in India? I do not know. But, do you agree that ten minutes are more than adequate for the perpetrator/s to accomplish what he intends to do? This takes for granted that you have a phone to use and a chance to call the police.

The idea of violence makes most of us uncomfortable and frightened. There is a tendency, probably a natural defence mechanism, built into us to think that violence is something that we read about in news papers, and see on TV, in other words, something that only happens to others. Without such a comforting outlook, life might just become too uncomfortable to live, fraught with nagging insecurity. But is such an unsafe outlook enough to protect us from violence that lurks beyond our deliberately selective consciousness and threatens the unsuspecting and unprepared amongst us? Obviously, it is not.

Who should protect your life?: Your life is very precious to you and so are the lives of your loved ones. You will agree that a price cannot be placed on these lives. As **Jeffrey R. Snyder**⁷ suggests elsewhere, then, what moral right do you have to expect another human being to die for you and your family for just Rs. 5,500 a month? Why should he or she stand between the bullets of a criminal and you, and leaving his or her children orphans? You would not allow your child to talk to strangers or allow them to stay out of your sight for more than a few minutes. Then why do you trust someone else to risk their lives to protect you and those of your loved ones?

Some suggest that the protective instinct of fellow human beings can provide adequate protection from crime – that there is safety in a crowd. Such suggestions should be weighed in light of the infamous Kitty Genovese case or those of other unfortunate victims, whose cries for help went unheeded. These cases show that help of others will be the most unreliable safety mechanism to depend on: People who value their lives as you do, will most probably act like you would, when you do not have a stake in protecting someone else in danger.

You may think that protection is a specialised skill and that only the armed forces of the state are trained and equipped to perform this task. What would you do when they refuse to discharge their duties? This situation cannot be demonstrated more clearly than this example: Abhijeet Singh⁸ writes in his hard hitting and eye opening essay on Mumbai Terror attacks, “Mumbai’s Harsh Lesson.....”

“Sebastian D'Souza a news photographer who witnessed the entire scene, and also took the photos that were flashed in most newspapers around the world, had this to say:

⁷ <http://www.thefiringline.com/Misc/library/cowards.html>

⁸ http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/12/mumbais_harsh_lesson_on_gun_co.html

“There were armed policemen hiding all around the station but none of them did anything. At one point, I ran up to them and told them to use their weapons. I said “Shoot them, they’re sitting ducks!” but they just didn’t shoot back. I told some policemen the gunmen had moved towards the rear of the station but they refused to follow them. What is the point of having policemen with guns if they refuse to use them?”

Assume that you are a dance teacher, or a software engineer, or an accountant. Perhaps you could identify with being a farmer, or a botany professor, or a dentist. But you can also drive, swim, clear the garden, play cricket, walk a mile, or perform any other day to day tasks that require skills other than those used on your job. It demands great determination, motivation, effort, and skill to complete your education, get that well paying job and be successful in it, raise a crop defending it against pests, animals, and fickle minded rain gods, raise a family, build that house, etc. If you could accomplish all these things, why can you not acquire so vital a skill, the skill of self-protection, and protect all that is important to you?

Remember, if you are a believer in god, while a prayer helps to keep the faith and gives you strength, prayer alone is not enough to protect you. All religions forbid suicide as a sin, and allowing others to take away your life is equal to that.

I hear you saying, “Yes, I agree that protection of my life and those of my family is my responsibility alone, and I agree that I do not want to risk entrusting this task to others. But, please, tell me what I can do? What chance do I have, a layman against that terrorist, a teenage girl against that pack of wolves bent on rape, a retired pensioner against that bunch of dacoits?”

Fortunately, there is a very effective tool against it. But before we discuss the antidote to what threatens us, we must understand the nature of violent crime.

What facilitates a crime?: Most violent crimes are about the equation of power in a situation. It does not take a criminologist or a professor of psychology to understand this, though most of them would agree to the following explanation. Many violent crimes take place because the perpetrators think that there is no threat of retaliation and they can get away safely after committing the crime. They think they have an advantage over their potential victims in terms of strength, numbers, age, or sex etc., especially due to their victims’ seeming weakness and lack of willingness to strike back. There is a cost-benefit ratio analysis behind almost all crimes. When there is determined and effective resistance even the most determined of criminals want to, ultimately, make a safe getaway, living for another day to perpetrate another crime. It’s a powerful instinct --the instinct to survive. Many of you must have seen the “Battle at Kruger” video on Youtube, wherein a buffalo calf is attacked simultaneously by a pride of lions and a few crocodiles. Usually, there is no chance for the calf to survive such a two-pronged and savage onslaught. However, once the buffalo herd decided to strike back, the lions knew that the odds were against them, beating a hasty retreat while the calf survived. However, we humans are conditioned to think that self-preservation is a delegated responsibility and place ourselves at the mercy of those who know it and exploit that weakness.

The balance of power is a handy principle that describes this better. The Cold War did not blow up into a full scale nuclear war, because both parties knew there would be no winners. Hitler used nerve gas to kill Jews, but not the Allied forces, because he knew that the Allied forces had chemical weapons also, and would retaliate in kind and with far greater severity:

“Ambros then warned Hitler that if Germany used tabun, it must face the possibility that the Allies could produce this gas in much larger quantities. Upon receiving this discouraging report, Hitler abruptly left the meeting”.⁹

Individual situations are not dissimilar.

I again here you asking: “How do I change this negative power equation and transform myself into a defender and a protector from being a helpless victim?”

The answer is the Gun.

Understanding the Gun: The modern gun is an extremely reliable, simple, practical and effective tool, a result of hundreds of years of scientific evolution and constant improvisation. It is simple to use, and any person with reasonable levels of fitness and hand-eye co-ordination can easily learn to use it. Age, sex, physical strength, etc., have little impact on one’s ability to use a gun effectively. Physical strength and numerical advantages of criminals can be effectively and safely countered with a gun. That is the reason guns are called the great equalisers. As a tool of self-defence, the gun is unparalleled for its effectiveness as a deterrent, neutralising the ability to perpetrate the crime and the psychological advantages of the perpetrator over the defender. According to the extensive surveys conducted by the eminent economist and University of Maryland Professor John Lott, “98 percent of the time when people use guns defensively, simply brandishing a firearm is sufficient to cause a criminal to break off an attack.” Lott also found that in less than 2 percent of the cases is the gun fired, and three-fourths of those shots are only warning shots”.^{10&11}

Even in situations where the criminals, like the terrorists in Mumbai, want to cause harm at the cost of self-destruction, they can be neutralised and taken out of action with judicious and skilful use of guns. At the least, the odds against the enemy can be greatly increased and the damage drastically restricted. All it takes is the right tool, skill, and a will to use it.

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nerve_agent

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lott

¹¹ http://www.johnlott.org/files/GenDisc97_02surveys.html

There is an important issue that must be dealt with here about guns. The greatest misconception about guns is that they cause violence and crimes. Guns are inanimate objects just like the pens, cars, spoons, ploughs, etc. They do not have a life of their own and we, the humans, use them for good things or bad things. More people die in car accidents than with guns. But do cars actually kill people or are reckless drivers responsible for these deaths? Do pens teach you how to write? Humans, who use these things for good ends or bad ends, are responsible, not inanimate objects. Some people think that owning a gun is an indication of a predisposition to violence. Reasonable people have burglar alarms in their houses, wear helmets and seat belts, keep a guard dog, buy insurance, save money for a rainy day, etc. These actions constitute reasonable plans against the contingencies of life. No one looks forward to calamities, even if they would validate the necessity of the preparations. Likewise, people who obtain arms and training make plans to avoid situations for which arms would become necessary. It does not make those who make such plans prone to violence, but simply people who are wise and prepared.

As it becomes clear that guns are essential for self-protection, questions arise about where one can get a gun and what processes are followed to obtain one in India.

The Gun in India

The Law: Broadly speaking the Arms Act of India, 1959, and the subsequent supplementary Arms Rules, 1962, allow all Indian Citizens who do not have criminal histories and physical and mental disabilities to possess three firearms under a license issued by licensing authorities: The District Magistrate/Collector at the district level, the State Home Ministry at the State level, and the Central Home Ministry at the Centre.

The Law in practice: However, in practice, successive Indian governments systematically decimated and severely restricted this legal right by various direct and indirect measures and maladministration of law, thus depriving millions of law abiding citizens from protecting their lives and those of their families. A brief explanation of gun control in India is warranted here to place things in perspective.

Colonial Legacy: Gun control, like many other legal issues in India, has its roots in colonial history. Post First War of Indian Independence of 1857, the British disarmed Indian nationals with the sole purpose of preventing similar uprisings that would destabilise the colonial establishment. The 1878 Arms Act was the culmination of these efforts, which completely prohibited all Indians, except Europeans and those who were loyal to the Crown, from owning firearms of any description. The Act also prohibited all indigenous arms manufacture. This prompted no less than the apostle of peace himself, Mahatma Gandhi¹², to pronounce, *“Among the many misdeeds of the British rule in India, history will look upon the Act depriving a whole nation of arms, as the blackest.”* -Mahatma Gandhi (An Autobiography OR The story of my experiments with truth, by M.K. Gandhi, p.238). The Mahatma also said, *“I do believe that when there is only a choice between cowardice and violence... I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless victim to her own dishonour...”*

¹² <http://www.ivu.org/history/gandhi/autobiography.pdf>

Present situation: Sadly, however, like the colonial rulers, the rulers of independent India carried these policies forward, exhibiting deep distrust of India's citizens and curbing their right to self-protection from the moment freedom was obtained. Perhaps it was a reaction to the uncertain and turbulent political conditions prevalent immediately following Independence. The State security forces in those times were completely insufficient and ineffective in providing security to people caught in the turmoil of partition, social upheavals, integration of princely states, and their resistance, etc. However fallacious, this line of thought was borne well past the period of integration of India. It can also be successfully argued that the successive Indian governments up to the present day have been afraid of the people's anger at their repeated failures to deliver on their empty promises, corruption, and failure to provide good governance. It is this distrust of people, spurred by fear, that is the motivation behind gun control in India.

Gun control in practice: Apart from imposing severe restrictions, local and national governments deny gun ownership through arbitrary and often non-transparent denials of applications and non-uniform licensing practices. One of the commonly cited causes for rejection is that there is no threat to the life of the applicant. A commonsensical look at the data provided so far makes it amply clear that threat to life need not come from known quarters; it can be from anywhere and any time. But, while law abiding and tax paying citizens are denied licenses, moneyed people (some even with criminal backgrounds), politicians, and those with political connections can easily get a license.

Another means of gun control is making arms & ammunition prohibitively expensive by severely restricting supply and imposing impractical restrictions on amounts of ammunition that can be owned. In 1986, the government of India banned all imports of arms & ammunitions for civilian use, citing terrorist problems in Punjab, North-East and Jammu & Kashmir. There absolutely is no evidence whatsoever by any source to suggest that imported sporting and civilian guns were used by terrorists in crimes. Almost all of the weapons and ammunition used by the terrorists were smuggled into India by illegal gun trafficking operations and mostly involved military style AK-47 assault rifles, which are prohibited for civilian use. As a result, the cost of legal guns and ammunition in India is probably the highest in the world. For example, Abhijeet Singh argues, an ordinary revolver that costs \$500 (Rs25,000) in USA costs \$20,000 (Rs. 10,00,000) in India. for the cost of a couple of cartridges in India will buy a whole box of ammunition abroad. How many people can afford such expensive self-protection? The government-controlled Ordnance Factories completely monopolize the Indian market for ammunition, which drives up the cost astronomically and permits the Ordnance Factories to supply products that are of absolutely inferior quality, thus depriving the paying customer of quality he or she deserves. It is worth noting that Indian ammunition exported abroad is universally recognised as one of the costliest and sub-standard in the world. Also, the licensing authorities often impose arbitrary limits on the amount of ammunition that can be owned by a license holder at any point of time. In many cases, it can be as ridiculously low as five cartridges per year, a tiny and completely impractical amount, absolutely insufficient even to learn how to shoot a gun accurately, let alone become skilled in defensive use of the weapon.

Shackling of the innocents and Failure of the State: Successive Indian governments adopted a perverse logic of shackling the innocents to compensate for their, the governments, shortcomings: the inability to restrain criminal elements and failure to provide security to Indian citizens. Nearly 1/3 of the administrative districts in India are declared to be afflicted by terrorism of various varieties. 32 terrorist organisations thrive in India and nearly 800 terror cells are in operation. ¹³

It does not need enumeration, the untold misery and number of deaths this terrorism has caused since Independence. Instead of succeeding in preventing terrorism, the Indian State, as mentioned above, banned import of arms & ammunition for civilian use, citing terrorist violence. The very same government, in the Integrated National report on prevention of illicit small arms submitted to the United Nations, admitted that:

“Since almost all terrorist activities involve the use of illegal weapons, including small arms, organisations indulging in such activities are declared as “unlawful” under the provisions of relevant acts”.¹⁴

Can there be a more startling example of self-contradiction and perversion of logic?

According to various international studies, there are around 40 million illegal small arms in circulation in India. Most of them are either illegally smuggled in or manufactured in the illegal cottage industries that dot UP, MP and Bihar. Some of these illegal guns, known as *Katta* or *Tamancha*, cost as little as Rs. 500, and the more advanced AK-47 types can cost between Rs20,000-40,000. Criminals never apply for licenses, nor do they spend a fortune to buy illegal guns. They get them cheaply and easily on the black market, and use them against law abiding citizens with impunity. According to the UN report cited above, the number of illegal weapons captured in India in 2007 amount to just 7,284; of which the highest percentage were *Kattas/ Tamanchas*, numbering about 2,000. Isn't this the proverbial drop in the ocean? Do not the rising rates of violence indicate the government's lack of effective stewardship on this important matter, and the ineffectiveness of their policies? Spreading unsupportable anti-gun canards are the impractical do-gooders and careerist opportunistic organisations who cry that there are 40 million guns in India. They fail to mention that nearly 39.1 millions of them are illegal and that the contribution of legally licensed firearms to crime is extremely low and disproportionate. They also conveniently fail to mention that a great many licensed guns are hardly in usable condition due to age, disrepair, and lack of availability of spares and ammunition in correct calibres. Choosing to ignore the facts, they suggest a blanket ban on all licensed guns. Who are they trying to help, other than their own coffers, which they fill by promoting chimerical fears?

¹³ <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/index.html>

¹⁴ <http://disarmament.un.org/cab/bms3/1BMS3Pages/1National%20Reports%202008.html>

Let me sum up the ironic tragedy of our governance. Most of our politicians are provided with state security and some with the highest level of Z category. For example, the Chief Minister of UP, Ms Mayawati, has 350 policemen providing security and 34 vehicles in her convoy at any given time. What protection does a common citizen have? Why should be there a premium on the lives of those in powerful positions but not on common citizens? Is selective extension and denial of legal rights, privileges, etc., not elitism and undemocratic?

Nearly one year after Mumbai terror attacks, when a citizen questioned about firearms licensing, one very senior officer in Mumbai police department remarked: “We are always there when a crime is happening and there would have been more deaths if the common people were armed. So let people stay unarmed and let us do our jobs.” This attitude is sadly typical of many police officers, who tend to regard the area of security and safety as their exclusive dominion and resent any purported trespasses into their area of authority. They, the police, apart from sharing the distrust of people with the government, often do not want to recognise their limitations or understand the concerns of citizens.

Examine this statement/attitude in light of the following incident: Abhijeet Singh¹⁵ most movingly writes, “When the terrorists attacked the Jewish outreach centre, bystanders pelted the terrorists with stones in a vain attempt to ward off the attack, but had to retreat when the terrorists opened fire with automatic rifles. Our citizens were trying to ward off the terrorists with stones! I cannot think of a more extreme example of how helpless the government has rendered its own citizens. In the absence of guns, and thus incapable of offering any resistance, they were simply like lambs to the slaughter. On that fateful day, this was a story repeated again and again all over Mumbai: unarmed civilians, slow & inept emergency services, and mindless slaughter of innocents.”

Check again the mind-numbing and logic-defying reaction of the Mumbai police department post Mumbai terror attacks. “While last year, from January to July, the police issued 116 arms licences, this year, the figure has gone down to 96. The police said after the terror attack, they received around 150 applications for revolvers and guns from builders, celebrities, hoteliers, politicians and security agency staff. However, they did not issue licences to all as they followed very stringent guidelines for it.”¹⁶

Post-Mumbai terror attacks, Mr Amitab Bachan, the film super star and celebrity, famously said that for the first time in his life he felt unsafe and went to bed with a loaded revolver under his pillow. Lucky man! He has a licensed revolver to protect himself and his family. But, the Mumbai police department denies common citizens the same legal right. How is this legally supportable, much less just?

¹⁵ <http://indiansforguns.com/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=5316>

¹⁶ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/news/city/mumbai/Now-getting-an-arms-licence-isno-childs-play/articleshow/4908341.cms>

On 20/09/09, no less an official than the National Security Advisor, M.K. Narayanan, in an interview to the CNN/IBN News channel, went on record to estimate the likelihood of a second major 'Mumbai-like' strike on India by saying: **“Here you are asking me a question that I live in almost daily dread that something that I am looking at or Home Minister P. Chidambaram.”**¹⁷

That's the failure of the system, not so much because the Indian Government's failure to prevent terrorist attacks from taking place, but for preventing innocent and law abiding citizens from protecting themselves from preying criminals.

State & Civilians Partnership: Though the Government of India's policy formulation, implementation, and governance affecting civilian lives, protection, and safety is marked largely by the lack of rationality and distrust, a striking illustration exists of the contradictions inherent in its own decisions. Whenever the State found itself with insufficient resources to deal with the problem at hand or expedient to its goals, the State did recruit the help of civilians in various forms. Post 1962 Indo-China War, the government initiated Civil Defence Training programmes, providing arms training around the country to raise a last line of defence. Even today, the *Sashastra Seema Bal* regularly provides arms training to villagers at the borders to fight and harass the enemy soldiers in case of an invasion. At different times, governments in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir armed citizens with government supplied guns and ammunition to fight terrorists! Right at this moment, the government of Chhattisgarh actively supports, arms and equips a counter insurgency movement called *Salwa Judum*. These examples make it evident that civilians can be trusted to bear arms, be proficient in their use, help preserve peace and security, protect the country, and still remain law abiding. This simple, yet profound, truth seems to escape the minds of our rulers.^{18, 19, 20 & 21}

What should be done?: The answer is simple: The Government must realise that empowering law abiding citizens is not detrimental to peace, stability and security of the country. Au contraire, such proactive measures would fill in the lacunae in governance effectively and efficiently. No one advocates an unregulated, free-for-all arms market.

Criminals must be prevented from acquiring firearms but on the other hand, if a person is eligible to vote, has no criminal back ground and is mentally stable, that person should be eligible to get a firearm license without having to go through the bureaucratic rigmarole designed to deny and disarm rather than empower and enable the law abiding. The Government must define the licensing procedures clearly and implement them speedily, fairly, and transparently, without fear or favour. Private initiative should be encouraged in the firearms industry, to introduce an element of competition that is essential to counter the evils of monopoly. This will enhance the quality of products available to consumers and ensure that they are available at reasonable prices. Ban on imports of firearms for civilian use should be lifted for the same reasons and also to make high quality self-defence tools available.

¹⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRDwppil8go> & <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Ilive-in-daily-dread-of-another-26-11-says-NSA/H1-Article1-456050.aspx#hide>

¹⁸ http://dgcd.nic.in/civil_defence1.htm

¹⁹ www.ssb.nic.in

²⁰ <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com/archives/archives1998/1998september03a.html>

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salwa_Judum

What can you do?: Politicians listen to nothing better than the language of votes and the voice of voters. Please write often to your local political representatives and leaders about your concerns regarding law and order and the need to reform the firearms licensing procedures in the country. Write regularly to newspapers, both regional and national, TV channels, and other mediums of mass communication, expressing your concerns and opinions. Talk often to people around you, inspiring interest and generating educated opinions about firearms.

If you would like to learn more about legal and responsible use of firearms, please visit www.indiansforguns.com It is India's first and only web forum designed to encourage debate and discourse of gun rights, impart accurate knowledge of guns, their safe use in a legal and responsible manner, self-defence and shooting sports. There are thousands of friendly members from all over the world who will be very happy to talk to you and discuss firearms with you.

Conclusion: There is an urgent need for all of us to recognise that the right to protection is an important component of our right to life, and that delegation of its exercise is not an option. To ensure that all responsible and law abiding citizens can avail themselves of the right to protect, we must convince our policy makers to rationalise the Arms Act and get rid of the irrational and paranoid approach to implementation that has marked its enforcement so far. In the interview quoted elsewhere in the essay, Sebastian D'Souza, the courageous photographer who was a witness to the massacre at the Mumbai Chhatrapati Shivaji station, uttered these telling words: "I only wish I had a gun, rather than a camera." Heaven forbid that there should ever be another incident like this, but let us hope that Mr. D'Souza, and scores of others like him, will not just have a camera but also a gun in his hands if there is a recurrence of those sad events.

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