



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice  
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA  
[www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties](http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties)

MUKHERJEE: This is the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009. My name is Rohan Mukherjee, and I am with Mr. Abhayanand, who is the Additional Director-General in the police of the government of Bihar, in charge of the Bihar military police. Mr. Abhayanand, could you briefly tell us your professional background and your involvement in the Bihar government to date?

ABHAYANAND: *My name is Abhayanand. I belong to the 1977 batch of the Indian Police Service and was allotted the Bihar cadre. In the year 2005, when this present government came into existence, I was the Additional Director-General of police looking after the intelligence, and then a couple of months later, I was also made the Additional Director-General of police headquarters. So I held two very important charges of intelligence and headquarters, which looks after the policy matters both regarding the intelligence part as well as the operational part. In that sense and in that capacity, both the capacities, I was almost handling the entire operational part as well as the intelligence part of the police department with the DGP (Director General Police) as the head of the police department.*

MUKHERJEE: When you came into this position, what did you perceive to be the major issues or challenges that were priorities?

ABHAYANAND: *The priority handed down to us, particularly in the intelligence aspect as well as the operational aspect, was kidnapping. Kidnapping for ransom was a major issue afflicting the state of Bihar. In fact, it was an issue all along during the election campaign also. The government wanted this menace of kidnapping for ransom to be checked at all cost, and it was prepared to do anything because it had been an election promise of the government. The government wanted kidnapping for ransom—and of course major law and order issues, which included murders—also to be checked.*

MUKHERJEE: So the government put these issues on your agenda?

ABHAYANAND: *Yes, the government did, in fact. I do not think it was in a written format, but informally during discussions we were told in the police department to pick out these issues, especially kidnapping for ransom, and then other violent offenses. For example, dacoity is an offense that is very peculiar to this part of the world. Robberies, murders, heinous murders, then mass murders, caste riots—these were issues the government addressed in the law and order issues.*

MUKHERJEE: What makes you think that at that moment the time was ripe for such reform? Why had it not happened before that?

ABHAYANAND: *I wouldn't be able to give you a very good and definite answer to this because that is basically a government policy. The government policies are dictated and created by the government in power, that is, the political government in power. But I can guess that it had become a major election issue. The elections were fought on law and order. People had talked about "Jungle Raj" (barbarian rule) there in the state of Bihar, and somebody came up and said, "I'll be able to get rid of the Jungle Raj." I think the government was primarily concerned first with this.*

MUKHERJEE: So there was no real pre-existing strategy to deal with this problem when you came into office?

ABHAYANAND: *No, nothing.*

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MUKHERJEE: Were you able to rely on any experiences, on your observations of other states in India or other countries in dealing with this?

ABHAYANAND: *No, nothing. It was an idea which I was working on as a District Superintendent of Police in a very small way. It went unnoticed because it was handled at a very low level in a district. But then those experiences had crystallized, and the logic behind that experience was simple. It said, let 95 cases not be detected, but if you are able to detect five cases, then ensure that the perpetrators of those crimes which have been detected are punished and punished as expeditiously as possible.*

MUKHERJEE: Thank you, sir. So your team, your department, initiated a number of important changes. We don't have time to speak about all of them, but if you could look back and think of the most important reforms that your department initiated, in terms of their impact on society or in terms of widening the scope for further reform, what would they be?

ABHAYANAND: *The first important point that comes to my mind about when I started doing all this in collaboration with my colleagues is the basic principle that whatever the police did would be absolutely legal. All of the actions would be guided through the courts and all of our efforts would be directed through the courts. There would not be any action of the police would not be associated with the courts. So whether it was cancellation of bail of the criminals who abused or jumped bail, the trial of criminals, or even the investigation part, it would be done fairly and legalistically so the results we got would have the stamp of legality on them.*

MUKHERJEE: Before we get into the detail of specific reforms, if you could talk a little bit about how your department was able to build support for reforms, because before that point, as has been pointed out by people in the media and other places, the image of the Bihar police was not the most positive one. So were you able to rely on any individuals or groups of individuals to build support for your reforms in that period?

ABHAYANAND: *Well, the activity that I took up, for example, speedy trial, is a word which now almost everyone in Bihar knows, or cancellation of bail. These activities were not carried out by our cutting-edge officers, people who are called district superintendents of police or even below them, the deputy superintendents of police. They just had no idea as to how a trial is conducted, because the feeling was that getting a trial conducted was not a part of their mandate. Their mandate ended with sending the case to the court of law. For them, that was the end of the matter. I had to literally pull them out of that state of mind and tell them, "Look, you can even pursue this in the court of law. It is a very easy process. You may not be aware of it. I will teach you how to do it. Just do it, and you will see the results."*

*We had 40 district superintendents of police because there are forty districts here in this state. Each one of them was initially very reluctant because they thought "Sir, this is not our job, why should we do it?" I had to convince them. So this is when I used my managerial prowess, leading the men into an area where they thought it was not their activity, first convincing them, and then galvanizing them. Then I made them enjoy the activity so that they did it so willingly that I did not have to do much later on. But the initial three or four months were a bit of a problem for me.*

MUKHERJEE: So in terms of creating that sense of mission among the people in your department, among the district superintendents, did you rely on any special incentives, rules or management techniques to achieve that?

**ABHAYANAND:** *No, I will not say that there were incentives. I had to convince them first that this was a part of their job, and second, that this process would give them wonderful results, which they had not yet seen. This was an activity through which, if they did it, they would see tangible results immediately. In other activities tangible results are not seen immediately. So I tried to convince them. I must give a lot of credit to all my district superintendents of police because they had faith in me. When I talked to them, I talked to them very passionately. Each one of them responded so well that the results were just astounding. Nobody had expected those results. I had not expected those results when I started because it was something absolutely new; it had never been done before.*

*As a result, the state benefited, and finally I would say, when the results started coming in, there were some incentives, like who was the best got the maximum. Then there was a sense of a competition. It was a very healthy competition among the district superintendents of police about who would do better. They shared their experiences. I knew that when I talked to each one of them; and I would talk to each one of them every day, right from 9:00 in the evening to 12:00 in the night, three hours. I talked to all the forty SPs (superintendents of police) on the telephone, sharing whatever they had done, guiding them, and helping them to move on.*

*Then I later came to know that all of them were sharing their experiences with one another and helping each other, trying to make each other understand what the practical implements were that they had adopted to achieve results. I felt happy, it was working.*

**MUKHERJEE:** Were you able to institutionalize this kind of an approach, or was it more informal, the consultation?

**ABHAYANAND:** *It was very informal, to the extent that it is not even documented.*

**MUKHERJEE:** At the same time, you said that you tried to involve the courts, your department tried to involve the courts in everything. So you must have had to rely to some extent on the support of the judiciary in doing that.

**ABHAYANAND:** *I will not say I tried to elicit the support of the judiciary, but then at a concept level, the government held meetings with the officers of the court, and in fact, there was a seminar conducted in Patna itself. This happened in 2007; I do not remember the month, but it was the second half of 2007. I think this seminar was unique in the sense that the dais was shared by the Chief Justice of the Patna High Court, the Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary, all the district judges, all the public prosecutors, and all the district superintendents of police, which means anybody who is a stakeholder in the fight against crime. I do not remember having read about a dais being shared by the judiciary and the executive simultaneously. I think that this was a good signal and it benefited us.*

**MUKHERJEE:** How do you think the members of the judiciary reacted to this new approach that the police department had come up with?

**ABHAYANAND:** *I cannot use the word that they helped us, no. They are not supposed to be helping us; they are supposed to be neutral. But basically it boils down to a trial getting delayed because the witnesses do not turn up. It is my job to produce the witnesses. As a policeman, it is my job, and this is what I put into the minds of the district superintendents of police. I said, "Just do this: get your witnesses, put them before the court, let them depose whatever they want to, but then insist that the witnesses come to the court." This is what we did. We did not let the courts go dry. We produced our witnesses, and we got our results.*

MUKHERJEE: That must have increased the caseload that these people had to deal with.

ABHAYANAND: *Yes it did. But I think to that extent there was no hesitation on the part of the lower judiciary, because they had also been waiting for witnesses to come. Traditionally, not many of the witnesses would turn up. Nobody took interest. It was for the first time that we made a speedy trial. This is exactly what we used to do, get the witnesses. The major issue used to be the witnesses, like the police officers and the doctors, would not come. So I ensured that the police officers went, and they did go. They said that they were happy to be deposing in the court.*

MUKHERJEE: In terms of popular support for your reforms or for your department's new policies, did you take any specific steps; did your department reach out to the people?

ABHAYANAND: *No, not exactly. It was like this. This used to be a monthly exercise. So on the last day of the month, it was my job to collect data from all the districts, compile it in the form of figures, and if there was a sensational crime which the counts had delivered judgment upon, then give it to the media. But on the last day, the data used to be compiled about how many cases and what type of offense, how many people were convicted for how many years or which fine, and other categories. That used to be compiled in a very standard format; that used to happen on the last day. The media would know exactly at 7:00, if they went to the office of the ADG (Additional Director-General) headquarters, they would get the data. They would all come in, even without my requesting them to come. I would hand them over the data and then the media would cover it the next day.*

*It became a routine sort of a thing: every first of the month the media would cover how many people got convicted. So the people started knowing and the words "speedy trial" became an adage, sort of. People started talking about it.*

MUKHERJEE: So it must have helped to have good relations between the police department and the media.

ABHAYANAND: *To a certain extent, yes.*

MUKHERJEE: How were you able to cultivate that; how was your department able?

ABHAYANAND: *They would come at the end of the month. Suppose a particular case ended in a conviction. Even the media started following it up. They would keep asking me, "What is the date on which the judgment is going to come?" They got quite excited about it. I did not even have to tell them, "Look, this is happening." They picked it up, and they were happy to pick it up. In fact, at times I would know more from the media than they would know from me.*

MUKHERJEE: So over time, the department was able to build up the level of popular support that—

ABHAYANAND: *Yes, I would say yes.*

MUKHERJEE: Do you see any challenges in maintaining that level? Could something cause it to go down again?

ABHAYANAND: *Right now, I am not associated with that activity anymore, so I would not be able to tell you exactly what is happening.*

MUKHERJEE: So if you talk about the specifics, like you said, the speedy trial is now almost an institutionalized aspect of the police, just for the people listening to this interview, if you could just briefly talk about the goal of this reform.

ABHAYANAND: *As I said, when the elections took place in 2005, containing crime, doing away with the concept of Jungle Raj. This was a popular phrase which was being used in the campaign, and when the government came, the first priority on the agenda was to contain the law and order situation since that had been promised to the people.*

*So the goal was basically to contain the law and order situation and get the fear psyche out of the people's minds. People were very fearful. After 7:00 at night, the streets were almost deserted. The government was very keen that this should go. That was the goal. When I picked up this concept of trial...as I said right at the beginning of my interview, we had to do everything through the courts. We worked very legalistically: no extra-legal methods were adopted. This was, I thought, the only way out: get the criminals that get caught, go after them, and produce the witnesses in a court.*

*Not only ensuring that conviction is made, but ensuring that it is done so expeditiously that he is just nonplussed. Say a man commits an offense today. If he can be convicted within 30 days, imagine the amount of mental shaking—that if he gets caught today, 30 days down the line, he is convicted. The amount of impact that it will have on the minds of criminals is anybody's guess.*

MUKHERJEE: So how did that figure of 30 days compare to the previous time period?

ABHAYANAND: *Oh, there is just no comparison. When I said 30 days, I do not mean exactly 30, but in our system, we have a concept of a prosecution report being filed in 90 days. If you file it, then it is supposed to be very efficient. There are instances after instances of kidnappings in which, from the day of kidnapping—and I'm not saying from the day of the launching of the prosecution—people have been convicted to life imprisonment within 90 days.*

MUKHERJEE: What unforeseen obstacles did you encounter along the way? Was there anything that you did not plan for in implementing this kind of a strategy?

ABHAYANAND: *No. As long as I was doing it, there was just no impediment. It was going very smoothly, everyone was cooperating, and everyone was happy. People were happy people were supporting it.*

MUKHERJEE: There were also some reports of a very innovative use of a clause in the Arms Act that came about. Now that also is in some senses a reform, even though it was already in the law, but to use it was innovative. Could you talk a little bit about that?

ABHAYANAND: *It's like this, Rohan. I did not create the law; I do not have the authority to create a law. I just used the law which already exists. In fact, I did not request the government to create laws to ensure that law and order and the crime situation would improve. You talked about the Arms Act. I can tell you very simply: I got the idea about the Arms Act from three facts. The three statements are, first, all major violent offenses are committed through firearms—they can be regular firearms or irregular firearms. Second, all the criminals who figure in any violent activity are, at one time or another, accused of Arms Act cases, which means having been found in possession of illegal firearms. This is a fact. As a policeman working in Bihar, I knew it.*

*Third, of all the offenses, the easiest one to get convicted of is an Arms Act case because it is just simple possession of a firearm and the witnesses involved are policemen. There is less likelihood of a policeman getting threatened by a criminal. Suppose I try to get a kidnapping case tried against him. The witnesses are all private citizens. The chances of their getting threatened are quite high. So I picked out the Arms Act and first went for the Arms Act cases. When the convictions started streaming in on the Arms Act cases, then I opened up to the other offenses of kidnapping, etc.*

*I had to first prove the point that, if I wanted to, I could get the convictions speeded up and get a good result. That helped to build confidence in my district superintendents of police. Yes, if we do it, we can get results.*

MUKHERJEE: Then once the results started coming in, was there any concern specifically in relation to the Arms Act provision that it might lead to too much power in the hands of the police, since they were all police witnesses?

ABHAYANAND: *Rohan, it is like this: there is no way in which the police force can arrogate powers to itself, especially if the police decide to take on the constraint of doing everything in a very legalistic manner. There is no way that they can do it in a system as such.*

MUKHERJEE: Is there any other reform that comes to your mind that took place in that time in your department?

ABHAYANAND: *Yes, there is one more. It is very interesting. When the present government came into power in 2005, the police department was woefully short of constables. The shortage was to the extent of about 12,000 in a force of 35,000. It was woefully short. We knew, being at the top of the operational part of the police department, and I knew especially, that there was no way in which I could get the shortage made up in the next three years. It involved the process of recruitment and training, and only after the training could the constables be used for operational purposes. That would have taken us three years, the recruitment and training.*

*So that was a big constraint. What came to my mind was very outlandish. It was proposed, it was accepted by the government, and it was accepted very fast. The idea was that we could take retired army people on contract because I did not need to train them. In the army, the constables retire at an early age compared to the police. We constables retire at the age of 58 and police retire at the age of 45. So I thought they would be good to work for another two years, at least until I could get my men. Contracts were given to retired army men. The concept of contract policing was being introduced for the first time—people taken on contract to do policing work. I think it was a win-win situation for the army people and the Bihar police.*

*I can tell you, even the Ministry of Defense, when they came to know that we had done this in the Bihar police, was so happy that they circulated a letter to all the states. The Ministry of Defense looks after the welfare of its retired men, so they want to get them reemployed somewhere. Therefore this was the best reemployment possible for the retired constables of the army, the jawan of the army. They circulated the contract policing project as an example to all the states, saying Bihar has done this, could you do it? Now a lot of other states do it.*

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*We called our group of about 5000 people, SAP, the Special Auxiliary Police. SAP was a big hit in this state. People were terribly scared of the SAP—army ka aadmi hai (they are army people)—that used to be the concept.*

MUKHERJEE: So were they deployed mainly in Patna or outside?

ABHAYANAND: *No, they were deployed all over the state. We had decided to use it only for operational purposes against the Naxals as well as the criminals, organized crime.*

MUKHERJEE: The training that army jawan or constables would have gone through would have been different from the conditions that policing requires?

ABHAYANAND: *Yes, that is a very good question. That is why we decided to put them in the operational part of the policing, where the chances of encounters taking place is very high. Legally, they could not go out all by themselves; they had to be headed by our sub-inspectors who know their law. These constables, these jawans from the army were not expected to know the civil law. So they were always asked to be led by sub-inspectors who know the civil law. They used to be under the direct control of these officers who knew their civil law, but on the operational side they were par excellence. The organized criminal gangs and even the extremist groups used to fear this.*

MUKHERJEE: So did this arrangement out in the field create any problems in terms of a conflict of authority that the operations are managed by one aspect and the legal side is managed by another?

ABHAYANAND: *No, in fact, you would be surprised that the sub-inspectors who headed the civil and the legal part of the police were very happy heading this armed unit of the SAP because they felt confident that if they got into an area where their chances of encounters were high...they used to be threatened. There are possibilities of encounters and firing so they have always wanted some force that they could rely on to even protect them. So on the contrary, they felt happy.*

MUKHERJEE: And the army officers were willing to take directions from the—

ABHAYANAND: *No, we did not take the officers; it was just jawans. So, very deliberately, we did not take the officers.*

MUKHERJEE: I see. Okay. In implementing this, were you again given—

ABHAYANAND: *Absolutely smooth, absolutely smooth, no issues. In fact, it is such a big hit that even after the recruitment and training have been done, we are still carrying on with SAP. The initial idea was in that period when the recruitment and training goes on. Could we have these people? That was the idea, but I think they are still carrying on.*

MUKHERJEE: So I will move on now to a slightly different but related topic, which is deployment, by which we mean organizing people to get a job done, moving money and resources where they're required. So in relation to this, there are a few questions that we have. First, finding talent to design and manage reforms is always a challenge in any department. So what kind of challenges did your department face at the highest levels in creating a team, locating people to carry out these reforms?

ABHAYANAND: *Unfortunately, I do not have the privilege of creating a team. It is not a privilege that I have or we have at the term. The team is there, whether you like it or not; you*

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*cannot create your own team. So the challenge is, "Can I or can we motivate that team to work out that challenge?" This was indeed a managerial challenge. I think I took it up. I told you in my interview earlier that everyone loved to do it. You know, it is about how much confidence your men have in you. How can I say that somebody is not good? If he is not good, I think it is my fault that he is not good. It's my job to make him good.*

MUKHERJEE: So that addresses the issue of motivation. In terms of capacity, did you take any steps to build capacity in those?

ABHAYANAND: *Yes, I did. In the same vein as motivating people...I knew some of them; it is very simple. Every individual has his own capacity. But then building on their capacity was a managerial challenge which I undertook, and it was a very informal process in which I would talk to them. I would discuss things with them, not only tell them, "Just keep doing it." No, when he would say, you'll come up with a problem so his problem has to be tackled and sorted out. They are all well-read people, so I would just tell them, "Look, look into this aspect of law, read it, and then come back to me." So they would come and discuss. They are all very intelligent people. You just motivate them and give them the space to think for themselves. I think they can all do it.*

MUKHERJEE: Were any steps taken to ensure the sustainability at that time of the things that were going on in the department?

ABHAYANAND: *You know, Rohan, I believe that sustainability is a matter of evolution. If you are working on a process, each individual who is working with you towards a particular goal does not work strictly according to your way of doing it. He develops his own way. Each way is a route to that success. I very firmly believe that if a particular route is taken, and it is a good route, like the process of evolution, that sticks and that grows. If the route that somebody else has taken is not good, it will not survive, and therefore it will die out. So only the good routes will sustain, that is what I believe. I cannot say, "Oh look, this is the route and I want this. This has to be sustained." Sustainability will come through a long process of evolution—things which are good will be sustained.*

MUKHERJEE: So in that sense, the external environment as well plays a role?

ABHAYANAND: *Yes, there are a lot of factors. How can I predetermine which route to take and know that it will sustain? I cannot predetermine it. I am only given the goals. Now there are forty district superintendents of police and each one tries his own experiment. I give them free space to try their own experiments, and they share those experiments not only among themselves but also with me, and I am very happy learning from them. But then I know all the experiments are not going to succeed; some of them will, some of them will not. Those that succeed will be sustained; those that do not succeed will not be sustained.*

MUKHERJEE: So do you think there is any way to increase that rate of success of the experiments succeeding, or is it entirely up to chance?

ABHAYANAND: *No, I will not leave it to chance. The goals are set; those goals need to be set higher and higher, and that is where people at my level count. But then there must be a lot of free space for the participants to do their activity.*

MUKHERJEE: So by goals, do you refer to the sort of broad mission statements of the police department, or more specific statistics—

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ABHAYANAND: *Very specific. For example, if I say speedy trial, that is a goal. I will have to create new ideas again. As a leader, I will have to create new ideas and sell those ideas.*

MUKHERJEE: So we have a few questions about situations that reformers and leaders in other places have experienced. Not all of them may be applicable, but since you were involved in the management of people, I would just like to ask a few of these questions to you.

ABHAYANAND: *Please.*

MUKHERJEE: In some places, we found that there is a pressure to provide jobs in a department, in any service agency, to important people or difficult factions or even family members of leaders and things like that. Some of the people you have hired may have had this pressure, or in your department there may have been this pressure. Did this exist? Was this a problem that you faced?

ABHAYANAND: *If you're working in a sociological system, you cannot be insulated. I accept that. Not only this type of pressure; each individual has a right to put up his demands. That is how I take it. If he is a constable, he has the right to put up a demand. He can come individually; he can come in a group as well. If he represents the people of this state as a constituency, he has a right to put up his demand and he has a right to his viewpoint.*

*Now as an officer who is supposed to be doing things according to law and according to a system, he has to consider everything and see what he has to do. Nobody can force you to do something, in a democracy nobody can. So I take it this way: it is his right to put up a demand, and it is my duty to consider it and do whatever is proper.*

MUKHERJEE: Thank you. Another issue that often comes up, and it is very relevant to policing, there are many elements in society that have a vested interest in bad governance: smugglers, criminals, people like that. A lot of them you have already named in your interview. In your department's efforts to improve the police force, did you encounter resistance from such groups, and how did you address that?

ABHAYANAND: *I did not feel the resistance directly, but yes, there is an indirect resistance. It is invisible. You can feel it at times, but I can assure you I did not feel it directly. It was not visible to me. I cannot deny that the invisible resistance is there.*

MUKHERJEE: I do not mean to probe too far, but when you say invisible resistance, is it just a sense in the society, in the media, or—

ABHAYANAND: *No, they have their own ways of tackling people, tackling these efforts like speedy trial. They have their own way of doing it. I cannot deny it because each individual has the right to defend himself in whichever way he wants to. Then the issue is that this can be tackled only at the level of the government, not the level of officers.*

MUKHERJEE: So you think a broad policy-level response is required?

ABHAYANAND: *Yes. I can assure you of one aspect: even this group that you have named—the group that does all the illegal activity antithetical to this process of speedy trial—even they accepted that the process which was adopted was very fair. So there was no animus against either the process or against the individual who had created the process. That was very obvious. There was no animus because there was nothing personal against anyone. It was against a bad practice, a bad illegal activity that was going on. It was*

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*being done very fairly, very transparently. Everyone was given a chance to defend himself, and then if he was convicted, so be it.*

MUKHERJEE: If I may ask, how were you able to obtain that feedback?

ABHAYANAND: *Not only in my effort here, but also earlier working at a junior level as a district superintendent of police I have received this feedback in abundance.*

MUKHERJEE: Just a few more questions. How important do you think is a senior officer's own background and personal management style in bringing about reforms in a department?

ABHAYANAND: *People say it is the system that works, but systems are operated by individuals. I remember I read a book which said the Office of the President of the United States of America was one thing under one person and another thing under another person. That office is an office. I think the concept holds true anywhere.*

MUKHERJEE: So would you agree that an institution is as good as the people who occupy it?

ABHAYANAND: *I will not say that it is only as good as the person. The system also has to work, unless there is a person who creates a system all on his own. He is too good. But if there is a system, then the individual will also count. So you can apportion some to the individual and the rest to the system.*

MUKHERJEE: So it was fairly commonplace to say that before these reforms started, the system was not working?

ABHAYANAND: *The system was in place. This trial aspect was never seen and still is not seen by the police as a part of the job. Technically, they say, "No, it is not a part of the job of the police." Even today. I am not seeing any reason why it should not be treated as a part of my job. What am I doing in a speedy trial? I am just getting hold of the witnesses and producing them in a court of law. I am not forcing anybody to pass a judgment in the form that I would like the judgment to be passed, but I am just forcing the pace of the process. I am sure that everyone would like the process to be speeded up. Who would like a trial to go on for years? No system would like that. I am just doing that.*

MUKHERJEE: In a minor detail-related question on that: would you have had to provide additional witness protection when you were doing this?

ABHAYANAND: *As long as I was doing it, I do not remember having had to provide a lot of protection to witnesses. Yes, in a few stray cases some of them demanded it, but on the contrary to what you suggested, I will share my experience with you. There are witnesses who came down saying, "Let my case be opened. I would like to depose." They are so eager to depose because maybe their father had been killed, their brother had been killed, or their wife had been raped. They would like to depose.*

MUKHERJEE: I see. Often people talk about the need for a reformer or reform-minded individual or department leadership to articulate a vision or a storyline to help the reforms move forward, to help society progress. How important is this step, do you think?

ABHAYANAND: *I am not saying that this was the most important step, but yes, this was definitely a departure from the past. It caught the attention of a lot of people. In fact, it caught the attention of the entire state and people started talking about speedy trial as if it were something like a new toy which everyone is exploring. I do not know how important it is. It*

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*definitely did give us results. It definitely improved the situation. It will also require a lot of refinements as things go on. You cannot just keep carrying on with this speedy trial; it will need to be reformed. As people say, if you keep doing what you are doing, you will get what you have already got. You will have to keep editing, reforming, and changing it.*

MUKHERJEE: There is also a sense in which the speedy trial issue addressed the most immediate concern pertaining to law and order at the time. So once the relatively easier cases to try were taken out of the way, now the more intractable issues are left. Has the department tried to address beyond the—

ABHAYANAND: *No, I do not think this perception is true. This perception is not true. In fact, we did not pick out the easy ones. Yes, initially we picked out the Arms Act cases. Partly, it is true that those are easy cases to try; you have very few witnesses and are almost sure of getting a conviction. But then the Arms Act is there. We have tried all types of cases and very difficult ones. A lot of them have ended in conviction; some have also ended in acquittal, where we couldn't get the evidence. So this perception that initially we tried all the easier ones and now it is the difficult ones that are coming: I do not think that perception is true.*

MUKHERJEE: With regards to the Arms Act cases, is it three years that is the maximum?

ABHAYANAND: *Yes. If it is not a regular firearm then it is three years, but if it is a regular firearm then it is six or seven years.*

MUKHERJEE: So do you think that the department has a longer-term view on those who go through the justice system and come out at the other end of three years or seven years?

ABHAYANAND: *Yes, we tried an experiment. Unfortunately, it did not succeed. We wanted to rehabilitate a lot of them. The government did that. It was done with a lot of fanfare. I was also there as a part of the system. But somehow it did not succeed. As I said, in the evolution process, this did not consolidate, and I do not know why it did not succeed. I am sorry, I can not go into the reasons, but we tried it and it did not succeed.*

MUKHERJEE: One of the last operational questions that we have is about obtaining information. When leaders make decisions, they look at various options, but one of the problems they face is obtaining ideas. They may even have ideas, but they are often too busy to collect information on which to base their ideas. So where did you turn to for information or advice or feedback on the things that were going on?

ABHAYANAND: *Rohan, this country has such a large population that we do not need to collect information. A man who is sensitive enough, who has worked in this state, he is feeling the gut itself: there is a lot of information. Nothing is wrong about that information because there is so much data available all around. You do not need to compile it. If you want to draw conclusions, it is there, the conclusions are very obvious. You do not need to be really meticulous about it. If you want to go into nuances of the conclusions, yes, you may need to have data. But in the very broad things, like the Arms Act, any policeman who has worked for thirty years in this state will tell you straight away the conclusions that I drew. Those are such broad conclusions that they do not need to collect data.*

*If you want to get into a lot of planning and micro-level, I think you would need to collect data. Fortunately, we do collect some data, but the authenticity of the data and the credibility of the data is not very high.*

MUKHERJEE: That touches on another issue that a lot of leaders face in other contexts, which is when you want to reform an institution, but the only source of information on that institution is a reporting unit within that institution. Then there are problems with reliability and credibility. Do you have any thoughts on how to get around that?

ABHAYANAND: *The problems are at such a macro-level that I think even if you were to touch the first layer at the macro-level, you would have done wonders.*

MUKHERJEE: Thank you. So just in closing, as I mentioned before we started our interview, our program helps leaders share their experiences and innovations in addressing the challenges that arise from building new states but also fundamentally reforming existing ones. In building this resource, we are always looking for new things to add to it. So if there is anything that we have missed in this interview or that I have neglected to ask you, would you like to add anything at this point?

ABHAYANAND: *I think it is a good exercise that you are doing. I was sitting here; my vision is within the four walls of this state. I have drawn my experience, my data, from this state and the problem belongs to this state. I also belong to this state. But yes, if I can share something similar from other states, maybe I will be able to do a better job. So conceptually it is good. But then I have a feeling that if I just keep thinking about where I am here and now: I am here, I am in now in this situation, and I just concentrate, close my eyes and concentrate, I think I know where the problems lie and how to reach a solution.*

*Sharing a lot of experience from all over, the difficulty arises when you have so many inputs that it is difficult to save the relevant from the irrelevant.*

MUKHERJEE: Thank you very much sir.