

Thane Police claim rise in conviction of cases; experts say otherwise

Despite the claims by the Thane Police, the present conviction rate of 35%, though more than the state, it is still less; experts say that with proper training to police officials on evidence collection and recording statements, the rate can be much higher



The District and Sessions Court, Thane. Thane Police have claimed an increase in the number of convictions of cases that went for hearing in the Thane Sessions Court. (PRAFUL GANGURDE/HT PHOTO)

Published on Dec 23, 2021 06:12 PM IST

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The Thane Police have claimed an increase in the number of convictions of cases that went for hearing in the Thane Sessions Court. However, lawyers and experts have claimed that there's still a long way to go.

The police record states that the conviction rate at present is 35% of the total cases that go for hearing. This was 25% in 2020 and 30% in 2019. The state average is 15% conviction rate in 2019 and 7.8% in 2020. The department claims the Thane rate is much more than this.

Experts feel that with proper training to the police officials on evidence collection and recording statements, the rate can be much higher.

In 2019, the Thane commissionerate saw conviction in 96 cases whereas in 2020 it was 24, less due to the pandemic lockdown, and in 2021, when the court had resumed only for important cases, the conviction again surged up to 107 cases in the Sessions Court of Thane. On the contrary, acquittal of cases has also increased slightly than earlier with 67 cases acquitted in 2019, 18 in 2020 and 70 this year.

The conviction rate is steady despite several hurdles across the year, claimed the police. During the pandemic, most officers were infected with Covid while a few even lost their family members. Senior officials claimed that convictions are due to team efforts that involve investigation, collection of evidence, writing and documenting the evidence properly in the charge sheet, keeping an eye on the witnesses and victims to ensure they do not turn hostile, and efforts of the lawyers who fight the cases.

Ashok Morale, additional commissioner of Thane police (crime), said, "Despite all odds during the pandemic, we have maintained a stable conviction of cases compared to the pre-pandemic year. One reason is the efforts of the police constables deputed to the court who are responsible for ensuring coordination between public prosecutors and investigating officers in a case. They work dedicatedly on each case assigned to them. They ensure the witnesses have received the summons and appear before the court on the scheduled date, help them in their statements, file evidence in court and complete all the needed paperwork on time."

These groups of court officers have a meeting once a month with senior officers of the police station to discuss errors and positives of the cases, he said.

Morale added, "We regularly organise training sessions for these officers but due to the pandemic, these sessions were reduced. However, we ensure that the monthly meetings are held, the efforts of these officers are acknowledged and encouraged."

However, contrary to the police claims, lawyers have a different view and proper training of police officials is needed to increase convictions.

Sangita Fad, a special public prosecutor with 100% convictions, said, "In my 20 years of experience, 80% to 90% acquittals are due to improper investigation. Cops need training in ensuring the FIR copy and the statement of the witnesses and victims are the same, the sections imposed and what evidence is needed to prove those sections, how the evidence should be bagged and presented. The cops also do not keep track of chemical analysis or other evidence of a case for years. There should be at least two law experts or knowledgeable officials in every police station."

Milind Mhaske, director of Praja Foundation, did a study on the pendency of court cases. He said that the police department needs more resources and manpower.

"The responsibility of getting convictions lay equally with both the prosecution and the police. Our society is completely dependent on police for things like security, and also expects them to investigate. There is a huge disparity in the number of cases that are registered and the number of investigation officers we have. This has overburdened the police officer," said Mhaske.

He said that there was a talk of dividing the legal and investigation team but due to fewer resources, it did not take shape. "Secondly, prosecution and investigation officers both need training to coordinate and ideas to improve conviction rate. It is a team work and everyone is lacking in some things. The sole priority should be getting justice for the victim."

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