



THE IDEA AND CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY POLICING AND ITS RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of welfare state, the traditional concept of police requires an overhauling in order to introduce the concept of community policing, whereby assistance and interaction with the public can be conducted on regular basis in order to prevent the crime. Due to industrialization and urbanization, the concept of close knit families is fading away, leading to increase in crime rate. By introducing community policing as a method of crime prevention, the police would be able to curb the offence particularly in the urban areas. Besides, the system of beat policing and chowkidari system would go a long way in improving the trust between the public and police and the general public would feel at ease while reporting the matter to police and simultaneously, the concept would inculcate the sense of belongingness amongst the police personnel that they are part of the community and are working for their welfare. With the said change in mindset, the concept of police as a force would transform to the police as a service which would be in sync with the democratic set-up of the country.

KEYWORDS

Community policing, law and order, crime control, involvement of public, police-public relations, beat policing, chowkidari, participatory process.

I. INTRODUCTION

The community is an active stakeholder in the law and order process of the country and it is also the ultimate beneficiary. Hence, the law and order cannot be maintained in isolation. The police, being a state subject, work for protecting the human rights of the people. Maintaining law and order involves various procedures as crime prevention, crime control, investigation, bringing offenders to book. Crime prevention takes an important role which largely involves active intelligence gathering. There are anti-social individuals and groups who hatch conspiracies time and again. Keeping a constant vigil on their activities would greatly contribute in maintaining peace in the society. This important task cannot be performed by the police alone and it would

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thus require active and coordinated efforts of the society, the people in the vicinity and those with whom such individuals remain in frequent contact. As such, the concept of community policing gains importance as it believes in the power of people and acknowledges the fact that police and community when united may solve complex situations with ease.

The concept of community policing has various significant benefits. Firstly, it works in strengthening the police-public relations; secondly it instills a sense of responsibility amongst the general masses as it makes them duty bound to report any suspicious activity in their vicinity and it also creates a fear in the minds of criminals that they are within the reach of police and law enforcement agencies and may be apprehended anytime. Lastly, it works towards making the citizens as law abiding citizens as each one is given the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the society, thus leaving very less scope for them to deviate from the basic norms of the society.

II. DEFINITION

In common parlance, community police is opposed to the traditional form of policing, where the police take assistance from the community, for performance of its duties. It revolves around community participation. It is a new form of policing system wherein the police force works together with the members of the community- at- large, in order to solve their problems.

As per Robert Trojanowicz, community policing is defined as a philosophy of full service, personalized policing, where the same police officer patrols and works in the same area on a permanent basis, from a decentralized place, working in a pro-active partnership with citizens to identify and solve problems.³

As per Van Rooyen, Community Policing is a philosophy and strategy which is based on a partnership between the community and the police to find creative solutions for contemporary community problems, crime and other crime-related matters.⁴

According to Robert R Friedmann, Community Policing is a policy and a strategy aimed at achieving more effective and efficient crime-control, reduced fear of crime, improved quality of life, improved police services and police legitimacy, through a pro-active reliance on community resources that seeks to change crime causing conditions. This assumes a need for greater accountability of police, greater public share in decision-making, and greater concern for civil rights and liberties.⁵

The United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs has defined community policing as a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder and fear of crime.⁶

Community Policing as a policing style provides for involvement of local residents in policing matters based on mutual trust and respect.⁷

Community policing is democracy in action. It requires the active participation of local government, civic and business leaders, public and private agencies, residents, churches, schools,

³ Robert C. Trojanowicz & Bonnie Bucqueroux, 'Community Policing: How to Get Started' (Ohio: Anderson Publishing, 1998)

⁴ Rooyen, H.J.N Van. *Community Policing*. (Virginia : Thorold's Africana Books, 1995).

⁵ Friedmann, Robert R., 'Community Policing; Some Conceptual and Practical Considerations', Home Affairs Review, Vol. XXXIV(6) 114-23.

⁶ US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, NCJRS Virtual Library, 'Community Policing Defined', NCJ No. 226882(2009). Available at:<http://ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library>.

⁷ Stevens, Peter & Dianna M. Yach. *Community Policing in Action*. (Juta & Company Ltd., 1995).

and hospitals. All who share a concern for the welfare of the neighborhood should bear responsibility for safeguarding that welfare. Community policing is being advocated by leaders at the highest levels of government including President Clinton and Attorney General Reno, who describes it as the “changing of policing.”⁸

Government and community leaders are beginning to recognize that they also must accept responsibility for keeping their neighborhoods safe. Communities must take a unified stand against crime, violence, and disregard for the law, and must make a commitment to increasing crime-prevention and intervention activities. Police agencies must help build stronger, more self-sufficient communities in which crime and disorder will not thrive⁹

To put it in simple terms, it is observed that the relation between police and public is generally not cordial. There are frequent clashes and rifts between the police and public. It is an established fact that police ultimately works for the people in a democratic country like India and hence in order to make the entire process successful, it is thus required that police and public work in tandem. Thus the role of community policing gains prominence.

III. GENESIS OF COMMUNITY POLICING

The concept of community policing could be traced back from medieval period. The system of Kotwal and Thanedar was in vogue during this time. Kotwal used to maintain record of the inhabitants of the locality under their occupation for proper supervision and control. The village headmen known as Muqaddam or Mukhiya were appointed to assist the local forces. During the period of Chandragupta Maurya, secret agents were deployed in order to help the police forces in detecting crime. During the reign of King Ashoka, the principle followed was welfare and happiness of general masses by imbibing the concept of community in police force. The village guard or watchmen system was introduced to prevent the villages from outside attack, theft, dacoity.¹⁰

However, during the British Raj, the system of community policing lost its relevance and significance, as the police during the colonial period was specifically meant to serve the imperialistic interest of the British rather than to serve the Indian community.¹¹

IV. OBJECTIVES

There are various pre-requisites of community policing, namely active participation of community with the police; redressal of grievances of community and organizational transformation of the community; greater involvement of general public in the functioning of police; acknowledging the principle of participatory process for the welfare and development of the community and reduction of crime and disorder in the society; establishing and maintaining healthy relationship between police and public to address community related issues in a more effective and efficient manner.

The prime objective of community policing is to reduce the crime rate in the society with the aid of active participation and involvement of community by solving their local problems and to reduce crime against senior citizens, women and children.

V. BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY POLICING

The police is generally perceived in bad light owing to alleged atrocities on general public. The atrocities are mainly due to overburdening, undue pressure and interference from

⁸ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles/commp.pdf> .

⁹ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles/commp.pdf>

¹⁰ India Police Commission, *History of Police Organization in India and Indian Village Police, Being Select Chapters of the Report of the Indian Police Commission*. (Delhi : General Books 1902-1903) 2010.

¹¹ Anandswarup Gupta. *Crime and Police in India -Upto 1861*. (Agra: Sahitya Bhawan, 1974).

external forces and lack of support and trust from general public. As Community Policing involves active cooperation of society, the same would bring the police closer to public which would lead to building up of mutual trust and cooperation. Such proximity would not only lead to efficient policing apart from reduction in crime rate, but would also help in bridging the wide gap between police and public. This would also have a significant contribution in reducing the corruption which is rampant in the modern policing system and simultaneously ensuring higher accountability. Besides, the police would also have a zeal to perform better once they get due respect and acknowledgment from the public.

Also, the task of police is largely field based. Each state of the country has its unique issues and problems. Many states are affected with problems of radicalization; communalism; menace of drugs amongst the youth; land mafia; sand mafia; goonda raj with criminals operating in the local area. Hence, the police need to come in close contact with the local public in order to understand their issues and to address their grievances in a more effective manner.

In the backdrop of these objectives and the fact that the law and order is a state subject,¹² each state in the Country has evolved its own unique ways and models of community policing to deal with contemporary issues in order to ensure that police is no longer treated as a force but is treated as a service.

VI. AREAS WHERE COMMUNITY POLICING CAN BE SUCCESSFUL IN INDIA

Although the concept of Community Policing is an ancient one, still it is very much relevant and may rather turn out to be beneficial in the current scenario.

Firstly, it has been observed that the joint family system is fading away and nuclear families are growing widely. With massive brain drain, the youth in India is moving away from the parental homes and settling in foreign land or away from home, if not on foreign land, leading to aged parents being left behind in their ancestral homes. The safety and security of such elderly parents becomes important as the anti-social elements take undue advantage of such loneliness and resort to serious crimes. Thus crime against the elderly can easily be controlled once the police actively visit such households on regular basis and take assistance of NGO's and self help groups including elderly groups, to redress their grievances. Such practice would also instill confidence in the elderly couple as they would feel that they are not alone and may reach out to police whenever in dire need.

Secondly, crime against women such as bride burning, domestic violence, eve teasing, sexual offences etc., can be easily controlled with community policing. Close association of police with the people within the jurisdiction would lead to an open and fearless environment where women can openly share their issues and fears with the police and gain timely assistance.

Thirdly, now-a-days owing to cut-throat competition, instances of suicide are common amongst the students. Such students usually live away from their home and may shy away from sharing their personal issues and problems with their families. With the help of Community Policing, the negative thoughts, the fears and the inhibitions can be wiped out and the psychological support can also be provided from experts, if needed. Similarly with active community policing the youth may be protected from evil effects of drugs etc.

Fourthly, in areas notorious for frequent and violent communal clashes etc. police may turn out to be a bridging gap between communities who are generally not at peace. Active talks and frequent visits of police in such areas may de-escalate the tensions and minimize the potential threat of communal clashes and violence.

¹² Entry 2, List II of Seventh Schedule, Constitution of India.

Fifthly, by way of active community policing, police may be able to keep a close tab on mafias, extremist groups, sleeper cells as the movement of such people and suspicious activities may be within their knowledge and timely preventive action may be taken before actual occurrence.

Lastly, the instances of police violence and rude behavior would also be controlled to a greater extent as the police would come closer and feel connected with the society. This would also positively impact the mental health of the police and they would develop the zeal to contribute better towards the society.

VII. CONCLUSION

Under the present scheme of criminal justice system, lack of effective investigation, long delays and increased crime rate have often led to the widespread criticism on the working of police as the criminal justice delivery system severely suffers due to the said aspect.

The police is the first in point of contact with the society and therefore effective community policing in India would not only increase the efficiency but would also go a long way in making the police more accountable to the public and the public would also not hesitate to disclose and report the commission of any offence to the police and at the same time the police would also inculcate a sense of belongingness towards the society as a whole.

The police in India perform manifold functions. There are many core and non core functions which are assigned to the police. The non-core functions viz., police verification, service of summons, road side assistance, patrolling, intelligence gathering etc., can be delegated. It is in these non-core functions, where community can play an active role. Such delegation would not only ease the excessive burden upon police, but would also ensure better administration, as the police can concentrate on their core functions which is maintenance of law and order and detection of crime. Such active cooperation and mutual trust would go a long way in promoting harmony in the country and the dream of public friendly police could be made a reality as against the colonial era mindset where police was far from the people and where people were afraid of approaching police. The idea and spirit of democracy which is people centric can be best served when the law enforcement agencies i.e. police work in tandem with people, create a close bond with them, work for them in a manner which creates trust and respect for the police. Further, there are various day-to-day issues which can be easily sorted once the police gives a patient hearing to those in need, seek and accept opinions and aim at finding a plausible solution to their genuine grievance.

Thus, specific reforms in policing system are urgently required in order to promote community policing which would in turn strengthen the criminal justice machinery system with the help of crime prevention and crime control in India. Besides, the process would also require active support of the government. Specific training programs are required to be conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs in close co-ordination with BPRD and other agencies to groom the police personnel for effective community interaction and soft skills. Necessary funds for such training program needs to be allocated by the Government. Besides, the police are also required to make special efforts on improvement of their public image. Further, designated reception area in the police station needs to be constructed coupled with warm and receptive approach so that the general public feel comfortable while visiting the police stations for reporting any matter to the police. Also, the police must refrain from causing undue harassment to the informers or witnesses who report about the suspicious activities and efforts must be made to relieve them at the earliest after getting their statements recorded.

Last but not the least, the Indian Police suffers from poor police-public ratio. Therefore, in order to promote community policing, it is incumbent that the current cadre strength should be increased so that adequate police force could be ear-marked for the community policing task.

It may thus be concluded that certain active and positive steps may lead to a significant impact on law and order situation as the anti-social elements would be placed under immense pressure since anyone from the community could fearlessly report about the preparation, attempt or commission of the offence in the wake of healthy police-public relations.

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