

**COMMUNITY POLICING: THE INDIAN APPROACH**

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**ABSTRACT**

Community policing and variations on it have become the operating philosophy and underlie much of police practice today. Moreover, community policing has become a powerful organizing theme that continues to shape how police departments deliver services, particularly at the local level of government. The range and complexity of programs associated with community policing are broad and have often evaded systematic scientific investigation. Nonetheless, community policing has and continues to transform modern policing in the United States and elsewhere. In India, community policing was prevalent in ancient India. In fact, the key feature of ancient police system was its community orientation. Creation of a police organization and specific powers of law enforcement, with preventive, investigative and prosecuting duties can be traced back to Kautilya. This article reflects on how community policing came about and was originally formed. Most importantly, it discusses about the role of community policing in India, its methods, drawbacks, and its effectiveness.

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## INTRODUCTION

Community policing encompasses a variety of philosophical and practical approaches and is still evolving rapidly. Community policing strategies vary depending on the needs and responses of the communities involved; however, certain basic principles and considerations are common to all community policing efforts. The movement toward community policing has gained momentum in recent years as police and community leaders search for more effective ways to promote public safety and to enhance the quality of life in their neighbourhoods. Chiefs, sheriffs, and other policing officials are currently assessing what changes in orientation, organization, and operations will allow them to benefit the communities they serve by improving the quality of the services they provide. Community policing stems from a view of the police as a multifunctional social service agency working to reduce the despair of poverty. It is rooted in the belief that the traditional officer on the beat will bring the police and the public closer together. Instead of merely responding to emergency calls and arresting criminals, community policing officers devote considerable time to performing social work, working independently and creatively on solutions to the problems on their beats. It follows that they make extensive personal contacts, both inside and outside their agencies. All of this flies in the face of a police culture that values crime fighting, standard operating procedures, and a paramilitary chain of command.

Although supporting evidence is largely anecdotal, community policing apparently has received widespread support at the conceptual level from politicians, academicians, administrators, and the media. It also has strong intuitive appeal with the general public. Yet, community policing has encountered significant stumbling blocks at the operational level nearly everywhere it has been tried.

There are *three primary elements* of community policing as follows:

- Community partnerships, which involves forging of partnership between the police and the citizens of an area.
- Problem solving, which involves identification and redressal of problems that give rise to crime and disorder.
- Organizational transformation, which involves transforming organizations to respond to community needs more effectively.

The following are the other *salient features* of the community policing:

- People have the opportunity to decide how police services are to be carried out in the community. It allows them to have greater voice in addressing their concerns and enhances the overall quality of life in their neighbourhoods.
- It follows the principle of participatory process of development. It recognizes the people's participation as it is not possible for the police alone to reduce crime and disorder that threaten a society.
- It offers a different connotation to the role of the police in a society. It widens the mandate of police beyond the traditional focus through a personalized approach to address community problems.

### **HISTORY**

The concept of community policing has been around for a long time and in the US it can be traced as far back as the 19th century. The primary purpose for its inception was to have police engaging with communities to build strong relationships between its members and law enforcement. One of the earliest and major tactics of community policing involved officers going on foot patrols through the neighbourhoods they serve. In today's modern era, this has evolved to departments incorporating social media and/or community engagement systems to share relevant local information with residents. It has been an integral strategy for cities that have looked to combat violence, drugs and other criminal activities. Since their earliest inception in the nineteenth century in the United States and England, the police have struggled with balancing the need to be efficient and effective, while also being lawful. Police practice is indeed rooted in Western political philosophy, which emphasizes equity, fairness, and justice. The police originally started as "thief takers," but their more traditional role has been to preserve local order. In their historic role of maintaining the public peace, the police have focused their efforts mostly on maintaining social order, controlling violence, and minimizing civil unrest. More recently the police have also been associated with reducing the public's fear of crime and improving community "quality of life". Although the goals of the police to preserve the public peace and maintain order are indeed laudable, in practice policing has often been criticized for its negative impacts—being inefficient, brutal, corrupt, and political.

### **EVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN INDIA**

The concept of community policing gathered momentum in many countries of the world in 1970s and 1980s. In India, community policing was prevalent in ancient India i.e. since the Maurya era. During medieval India also, a village chief called Mukaddam or Sarpanch used to work as a police officer and used to maintain law and order with the help of village community. At further upper levels, the Muhasil or Gumastha, representatives of Fauzdar, Khwaza and Musarif used to help the community policing. During later era of Sultanate and Mughal era, the policing became secondary. The primary concerns of the government forces was militaristic and collection of revenue. The provinces were put under hereditary Subedars, who were responsible for administration including criminal justice and law & order. The provinces were divided into Sarkars roughly equivalent to today's districts. A Fauzdar was responsible for law, order and suppression of crime and rebellion in Sarkar. A Fauzdar had 500-1500 soldiers under him depending upon the size of the Sarkar. Further the Chowkidars or village watchmen employed by the village community. In urban areas, chief of city police was called Kotwal. During British era, the law and order passed into the hands of Zamindars as per changes made by Lord Cornwallis. A uniform police force was established with Darogah in every district. The Darogahs were made responsible to district judges. However, community policing had lost its whatever relevance. In independent India, the law and order was made a state subject and some states tried to implement the community policing. For example, West Bengal had a programme called the Village Resistance Group to deal with dacoits in rural areas. In Gujarat and Maharashtra, community policing programme called Gram Rakshak Dal was established. Similarly, in Karnataka enactment of the Karnataka Village Defense Parties Act of 1964, which became operational in 1975 aimed to establish community policing.

### **ROLE OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN INDIA**

Uniform application of law without discrimination is a basic principle of democratic system. For this purpose, almost every country has devised a law enforcement agency called 'police'. This agency is expected to render impartial service to law. But while performing these functions, the role of police has ever remained controversial. It has been witnessed the world-over that police are more used to abuse the powers vested in them. Still people are expecting that police organization should be "people friendly police". There should be involvement of people in the operational work of police. It is called as community policing. It keeps them at

the centre stage. It works in a fair and non-discriminatory manner. It promotes transparency in its working and is incorruptible. It shows readiness to the people in need by extending prompt help thereby standing true to the message: "Police is always with us".

**Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD)** while recommending a model for community policing during 2003, has referred to it as "normal policing of a society in consultation, cooperation and partnership with the community at large". Objectives of community policing as per the Bureau are "To minimize the gap between policemen and citizens to such an extent that the policemen become an integrated part of the community they serve and they earn the acceptance and trust of the community, leading to spontaneous co-operation from people in crime prevention and security in local area and resulting in a lasting partnership between the police and the community". As for the mission of community policing the Bureau recommends "To prevent and detect crime, maintain order and ensure safety and security of the community in partnership with the people and to provide the community efficient, transparent and responsive law-enforcement machinery which perpetuates the rule of law".

**Predictive Policing:** Predictive policing refers to the usage of mathematical, predictive and analytical techniques in law enforcement to identify potential criminal activity. Predictive policing methods fall into four general categories: methods for predicting crimes, methods for predicting offenders, methods for predicting perpetrators' identities, and methods for predicting victims of crime. The technology has been described in the media as a revolutionary innovation capable of "stopping crime before it starts". Predictive policing uses data on the times, locations and nature of past crimes, to provide insight to police strategists concerning where, and at what times, police patrols should patrol, or maintain a presence, in order to make the best use of resources or to have the greatest chance of deterring or preventing future crimes.

**Proactive Policing:** Proactive policing is the practice of deterring criminal activity by showing police presence and engaging the public to learn their concerns, thereby preventing crime from taking place in the first place. In contrast, responding to a complaint after a crime has been committed is reactive policing. Proactive enforcement is usually defined as the predisposition of a police officer to be actively involved in preventing and investigating crime. Because police patrol work is highly unsupervised, most officers have considerable discretion or personal initiative regarding their level of proactive behaviour on the streets.

Again, it would seem logical that the stronger the level of perceived community alienation among police officers, the weaker will be their sense of mastery and motivation to engage in proactive law enforcement behaviour. Proactive policing is closely related to the practice of community policing.

### **COMMUNITY POLICING IN URBAN SLUMS**

Policing urban centers also brings with it new challenges. Common to all Indian cities, as in many countries in Asia, is the presence of large segments of the city's population living in slums, which are characteristically small dwellings with no electricity, running water, or basic amenities. The percentage of the population in major metro cities that lives in slums ranges between 10% and 20%. This translates to approximately a million and a half out of 14 million. Delhi alone has 10% of its population living in slums. The city of Mumbai has a significantly higher percentage of slum dwellers, estimated to be nearly 50%, with some families living in small spaces of about 50 square ft. and having a monthly income of US\$50. The community policing programs called slum Police Panchayats began in 2003 in five slums in the city of Pune in the State of Maharashtra. The panchayat's primary responsibility is to patrol the neighbourhood and liaise with the assigned police officers. Each panchayat maintains a record of the members on duty and the disputes that are handled in the center.

### **COMMUNITY POLICING IN RURAL INDIA**

As noted, India's rural land mass and population is nearly 70%. The primary membership for village defense programs in rural India, as seen in examples from the urban community policing program, is drawn from the local community to serve and assist with community law-and-order issues. Most programs have minimum membership requirements. These include a membership status of good standing in the community with age limitations in the range of 18 to 70 years. In the predominantly rural district of Nalgonda in Andhra Pradesh, the project Aasara was introduced partnered with the police department which included government departments such as the Revenue Department; District Rural Development Agency (DRDA); State Government departments of Women and Child Welfare, Education and Health; and businesses such as State Bank of Hyderabad and the BC Corporation. In addition, many NGOs including local chapters of the Red Cross organization, and the Prajwala women's organization are active partners. The local member of the State Legislative Assembly assured support for a donation of 20 acre homes and agriculture land for

horticulture for victims rescued from illicit trafficking as an alternative means of employment, while the Red Cross sponsored numerous health camps.

### **COMMUNITY POLICING IN TRIBAL INDIA**

India's rural population is also very diverse. Nearly 8% of India's population, or more than 70 million people, live in tribal areas. The distribution of the tribal population in India varies from one state to another. Most of India's tribal population lives in forested areas that are characteristic of low political and economic significance, reflecting some of the most underdeveloped and poverty-stricken areas of the country. Project Prahari is a community policing initiative in the state of Assam. This involved working with both the villagers as well as well as the police officers. The process began with the creation of Community Management Groups which were formed at the levels of district, state and local police stations. Interestingly, the strategy of the CMGs was not to directly tackle the witchcraft issue but rather to approach it indirectly by community involvement in self-help projects, such as developing community wells and canals to obtain water for agriculture and sinking bore wells for community water needs, among others, as ways to establish community support. The police improved their image by repairing roads and bridges, constructing community centres, and generating employment activities for village youth.

### **ISSUES OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN INDIA**

Here in India, fear of policing authorities is deeply engrained in its citizens. After more than a century of colonial-style policing, the uniformed officer retains a reputation for being coercive and arbitrary, less so as a figure of support or protector of the people. Such perceptions do little to increase feelings of safety in communities at a time crime rates are worsening in India's rapidly expanding cities. Between 2009 and 2013, annual incidences of crime in India's mega cities jumped from 343,749 to 556,024, amounting to a 9% increase. In 2014, Delhi alone accounted for 22.7% of the total crimes reported in 53 mega cities across the country.

There are several pot holes in the police functioning which erode its faith among the masses. Handling of registration of First Information Reports (FIRs) in police stations is a serious problem. Though registration of an FIR "...is an obligation under law," a common citizen finds it very difficult to lodge an FIR as "... it takes two weeks to get an FIR registered." The recent case in which it took two hours for a Supreme Court judge to get an FIR registered in

the capital is sufficient to highlight the problem in registration of FIRs. While taking a tough stand on this issue, a Bench consisting of Justice B.N. Agarwal and Justice P.P. Naolekar“...ruled that if the police officer concerned refuses to file an FIR on receipt of a complaint, he should be suspended forthwith.”

Besides, there are several other ways in which the police misuse power, perpetrate excesses and misbehave with the common man let alone the indicted and those in the lockups. Numerous enquiry reports, judicial pronouncements, media reports, survey reports, etc. stand testimony to this fact. Police departments also lack the resources and capacity to tackle security challenges on their own. A study conducted by the United Nations has revealed that while, on average, there is one police officer per 333 civilians globally, the Indian ratio is one officer per 761 civilians. Furthermore, national work force studies not only report high vacancy rates in state police departments but also low morale and exhaustion among existing officers. Community policing can serve as a tool to improve relations between police and citizens, and augment the existing capacity of law enforcement. Numerous state bodies and commissions have encouraged its use.

### **EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY POLICING**

In India, law enforcement is a state subject; therefore, there has not been any one initiative from the top i.e. the Central Government level but many at the local police station, district and state level ones. Several state polices such as Karnataka, Punjab, Kolkata, Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh have defined ‘community policing’ on their websites and issued general guidelines for the public. Some of the community policing initiatives and experiments conducted by the states are listed below:

#### **1. Community Policing Initiative for Mumbaites**

One of the community policing initiatives is the **Public Concern for Governance Trust (PCGT)**. This is an experiment which mobilizes public opinion and increases public participation and activism towards creating more transparent and efficient governance. The proposed activities of the project involves, initiating values and ethics among Police Force and Civil Society; to identify public concerns and their prioritization through sample surveys, research, focused group discussions with individuals and other groups including NGOs; to identify the specific issues/problems causing grievance to civil society and law enforcement agencies through experiences of public and police officials; initiating dialogue between the

Police and Public and thereby develop and suggest remedial measures for the identified concerns; conducting attitudinal change lectures, workshops and seminars among the Police and Civil Society and taking police to educational institutions to instruct students about civic values and lastly by increased interaction of the Police personnel with other professional groups on specific issues of ethics in governance.

## **2. Mohalla Committee Movement trust:**

It was established in Mumbai in the wake of Hindu-Muslim riots of 1992 and 1993. Mohallas or beat patrol met regularly to address variety of issues concerning the community such as concerns relating to health, education, environmental issues, issues related to communal harmony etc. Committee meetings were also held regularly before and during Hindu and Muslim festivals, occasions that bring people together in large numbers, therefore creating opportunities for communal flare-ups. Not all Mohalla committees had the same agenda. Some of the goals include focusing on complaints related to police work in the area; addressing community concerns relating to water, health, garbage disposal, and environmental issues, among others; enhancing educational opportunities for children and promoting communal harmony. Some Mohalla committees also served as conflict resolution centres, with upstanding citizens drawn from both religious groups.

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**5. Community Policing: Friends Of Police, Tamil Nadu**

The **Friends Of Police (FOP)** is a holistic and pro-active concept that lends a psychological approach to policing. It is a true example of police public partnership where citizens have been empowered along with the police. FOP provides opportunities for ordinary citizens to effectively contribute to the prevention and detection of crime. Any member of the public, male or female who is not involved in civil or criminal case can become a member of FOP. FOP members can also prevent any abuse of police power because of easy accessibility to the station house officer and other senior personnel. Role of FOP:

- Beats and night Patrols
- Assistance in traffic
- Crime prevention
- Information collection
- Assistance in Law and Order Maintenance
- Involvement in Prohibition Work

**6. Samarth Yojna Community Policing Experiment, Coimbatore City**

The city has witnessed two communal riots, violence, and inhuman brutality. There has also been an increasing level of criminal activities etc. It was because of this appalling situation

that, Mr.K.Radhakrishnan, IPS, decided to implement a community policing experiment to bring the situation under control. The main objectives of this experiment were to perceive and resolve the communal problem and also to win the confidence and trust of the people.

### **7. Trichy Community Policing**

Before community policing was introduced in Trichy, the crime rate was very high. To challenge forces of fundamentalism and lawlessness, and instil a sense of confidence amongst the people, following community policing strategies were introduced:

- Beat Officers System
- Complaint/Suggestion Box System
- Wide Area Network (WAN)
- Help line for Women in Distress
- Slum Adoption Programme

### **8. PRAHARI: The Community Policing Initiative In Assam:**

The community policing initiative aimed at changing the attitude of the average policeman at the police stations towards the public, to make them people friendly and to improve their living and working conditions. The goal of **PRAHARI** was to tackle social problems and bring the police and community closer.

### **9. Community policing experiment in Punjab:**

**Community Policing Resource Centres (CPRCs)** have been set up in Punjab, which are autonomous registered “societies” jointly managed by representatives of the community and police officials. These units include one for victims of crime, one for non-resident Indians, and a unit set up specifically to serve women. As a result of this experiment, the reporting of domestic violence has tripled.

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY POLICY PROGRAMS**

It is unclear to what extent any systematic research has been attempted in order to evaluate community policing programs in India. Newspapers occasionally report concerns or anecdotes of specific instances of citizen concerns relating to community policing. For instance in one of the Times of India reports (Prashar 2011), some citizens reported that,

though the local police department had made plans to create community policing programs to involve senior citizens, not much has been done. These citizens viewed the policing as perceiving senior citizens as more of a hindrance, while the police management reiterated that they have to focus “more on core duties rather than such activities,” suggesting a disconnection between the two primary partners in community policing.

### **CONCLUSION**

To a large extent, community policing programs in India do not resemble those commonly seen in the developed Western countries. Civil society organisations and creative and driven chief executives and senior police bureaucrats have tirelessly worked at improving synergies between the community and the police. Clearly, in areas where police organisations have adopted a more “social work” approach to developing partnerships with local residents, it appears that community support for the regular policing efforts flows naturally. These examples also suggest that the concept of community policing needs to be revisited.

Thus community policing in the Indian scenario as well as internationally, involves cultural change as in most of the countries semi-military and highly hierarchical model of policing has been prevalent. It involves intensive training and sensitization of policemen to accept the equal role of citizens. Police as a service provider and directly accountable to citizens is an alien concept and needs cultural change at the organizational level and attitudinal change at the personal level for policemen. It also means training the citizens for meaningful participation and change in their thinking as most of the time community “looks up” to law enforcement instead of engaging itself in the process of decision making as partners.