

## Police Public Relations in India: A Situation to be Addressed

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### I. Introduction

The police what we see in India today is yet another gift of the British System who wanted these police setups just to subjugate the Indians agitating against them. Even after 150 years of the Police Act of 1861, we are still following the same pattern of the police and policing in India. There is a huge gap between how the public wants to be policed, how the police want to police us and how we are actually policed. People as of today have perceived a notion that police are no less than goons. They are exploiters, intruders; parasitical is what general public think for police. The first and foremost task of the police is to detect a crime and that cannot be done efficiently without the co-operation of public. Because of the political interference the morals of the police haws weakened a lot which creates a hindrance in the performance of the police in general. What is expected from police is that they are there for maintenance of law and order but it is found that police more or less are performing for the superiors whose orders they tend to follow. It is generally that the police have to be responsible to the public but it is not so rather they do owe allegiance to the political parties and their members. In this background this paper attempts to understand the relation between police and public and their significance in bringing a sense of trust to help prevail law and order.

*It goes without saying that law and order is fundamental to the existence of a functioning democracy and a civilized society. The rule of law is the bedrock of a modern economy. As the instrument for maintaining the rule of law, an efficient, effective and accountable police administration is one of the most essential institutions of the state.*

*Dr Manmohan Singh,  
Prime Minister of India*

Police are one of the most ubiquitous organisations of the society. The policemen, therefore, happen to be the most visible representatives of the government. In an hour of need, danger, crisis and difficulty, when a

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citizen does not know, what to do and whom to approach, the police station and a policeman happen to be the most appropriate and approachable unit and person for him. The police are expected to be the most accessible, interactive and dynamic organisation of any society. Their roles, functions and duties in the society are natural to be varied and multifarious on the one hand; and complicated and complex on the other. Broadly speaking the twin roles, which the police are expected to play in a society are maintenance of law and maintenance of order.

Police is a part of the community. It is the community that maintains the police force which, in turn serves the community. The police exist for the welfare of the community. We find community participation in policing even in ancient India. If one studies Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, one can find an account of police in ancient India. Prevention of crime then was not the sole responsibility of the police administration. Reporting of strangers and suspicious individuals was incumbent on the average citizen, owners of the rest houses, entertainers and physicians. This is a wholesome requirement which, while not given up entirely, has now become a mere ritual. This is to say that the community is not involved in policing and we are suffering from lack of community policing.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Historical Development

What sort of police system did India inherit from the period of British rule? The basis for police operations and organization is still the British 1861 Police Act for India and therefore, as Dr. Acharya notes, "Contemporary Police philosophy in India is an ironic combination of British liberal tradition and British colonial practice."<sup>4</sup>

The police were subordinate to the rule of law but not citizens in uniform like the British constable. The police in India were modelled on the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) rather than Sir Robert Peel's English "New Police". The RIC was a force designed to maintain the rule of an alien polity and thus an appropriate model for other colonial police forces. Therefore the Indian police became associated, especially during the twentieth century independence struggles, with the machinery of British "oppression" Under the British Indian police system the police were a decentralized body of state and city forces. They were, in broad terms, divided into the unarmed or civil

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<sup>3</sup> C.V. Narasimha Reddi, "*Effective Public Relations and Media Strategy*", PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd., 02-Nov-2009

<sup>4</sup> Dr. M.R. Acharya, "*Recruitment and Promotion Policies of the Police Personnel in India*", *Journal of the Society for Study of State Governments*, vol. 5, nos 3, 4 (1972), p. 221.

police who were responsible for all ordinary police duties, and the armed police who could be used in the suppression of public order problems.<sup>5</sup>

When independence was achieved the new Indian government made no fundamental change to the imperial policing system. Under the constitution and by the inherited body of laws the police function remained decentralized and the responsibility of the state governments but the Union government provided certain important police services and retained the ability to raise national reserve police forces. Efficient policing, defined here as the ability to prevent crime, apprehend criminals and maintain order with available resources, will in practice vary considerably from area to area.<sup>6</sup>

### III. The Present Status and Police Reforms

As in all societies today there are no easy answers to the police response to internal conflicts. Governments will try to govern and, hopefully, people can be assured of certain minimum rights in times of internal crisis. The familiar police request for more men and more pay is as appropriate to India as any other country. In this context Indian governments have a "chicken and egg" dilemma. Do they put resources into a larger and better paid police force which may be more able to control internal conflict, the "symptoms" approach? Or do they put resources into economic and social development, the "causes" approach? In practice, of course, the governments will have to try and do both because economic and social miracles will not happen quickly enough to satisfy the needs of all the population; internal conflicts will continue. One useful measure that has been contemplated but not enacted is the introduction of a new Police Act for India. Such a measure could preserve the best of the imperial system, the policeman as the servant of the law, whilst more explicitly relating the police to modern Indian society by stressing the concept of the police as a service — rather than the imperial concept of the police as a government force. As one Indian police writer has well noted, "The reputation of our police for fairness and impartiality can only be established when the people of this country (India) confidently expect the police to enforce the law without distinction of social or religious class or political party."<sup>7</sup> General public confidence in the police in India will not be easily attained or maintained but it will be worth striving for in a country with so many intractable problems.

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<sup>5</sup> F.E.C. Gregory, "*The Indian Police System And Internal Conflicts*", <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/viewFile/14530/15599>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Superintendent Shri S.K. Ghosh. *Orissa Police. Lawbreakers and Keepers of the Peace*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta, 1969), p. 16.

Today general public believe that police is itself a problem rather than solution to a problem. India is a country on the move. Momentum is gathering toward achieving the democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution, a democracy of “we, the people...” Recent initiatives from the Government have signalled political willingness to reform aspects of governance traditionally conducted behind the walls of secrecy and bureaucracy. There is an increasing recognition of the importance of access to information for strengthening the credibility and effectiveness of government institutions and more generally for enhancing democracy itself. Particularly with the Right to Information Act 2005 (RTI Act) coming into force recently, the current scene is set for redressing some of the past hurdles of engaging with government. Citizens now have a legal right to the sort of information that promotes an informed democracy and accountability within the halls of power.<sup>8</sup>

Nowhere will the impact of this movement be felt more than in the Police of India. Indeed, the Prime Minister has indicated that the time has come for the Police to reform itself with transparency and accountability:<sup>9</sup>

*Building such a culture, I believe, is one of the most important challenges that all police officers must address on a priority basis. We need to ensure that police forces at all levels, and even more so at the grassroots, change from a feudal force to a democratic service*

*There is therefore a need to ensure honesty in our forces. There is a need to ensure transparency in our dealings, with our citizens and also within our own forces.*

In India policing is different than what, policing public expect from the police. It is pertinent to note here that reforms to this effect have been initiated. Police reforms have become a major issue in the recent past and in order to bring this into effect PILs in the Supreme Court have been filed<sup>10</sup> and the Court is of the view that-

*“The reforms, it needs to be understood, are not for the greater glory of the police. The reforms are for better security and protection of the people of the country, for*

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<sup>8</sup> Tharron McIvor, “Policing in India: a Crisis of Confidence and Credibility -The Right to Information and its Implications for the Police-“ [http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/papers/policing\\_in\\_india\\_a\\_crisis\\_of\\_confidence\\_&\\_credibility.pdf](http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/papers/policing_in_india_a_crisis_of_confidence_&_credibility.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> PM's address to Superintendents of Police Conference, September 1 2005, New Delhi, at <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=182>.

<sup>10</sup> Prakash Singh was the petitioner in the Public Interest Litigation that led to the Supreme Court's landmark judgement on police reforms.

*upholding their human rights and generally for improving governance. The present generation of police officers will have to rise to the occasion to fulfil the expectations of the people”<sup>11</sup>*

#### **IV. The Community Police**

Amidst these reforms one can see that there are certain places where police itself has taken initiative for improving police public relationships. One such glaring example can be found in the State of Kerala where Community Policing called “*Janamaithri*”<sup>12</sup> has been started to improve and enhance the police public relations.

The term Community Police does not refer to either a new police group or a local community group that undertakes policing work themselves. On the other hand, it envisages a method of policing by members of the police organization quite distinct from the traditional style; that seeks the cooperation of the community, understands the needs of the “community”, gives priority to the security of the “community”, and, taking into account the resources available within the “community”, attempts to streamline the activities of police personnel at local police stations to address the special problems of each community to increase their efficiency and productivity.

Janamaithri Suraksha Project is structured so as to facilitate closer community involvement in ensuring security and safety within communities. The project envisages achieving the following objectives.

- ✓ To prevent crime
- ✓ Co-operation of the Police and the Public in security matters
- ✓ To ensure mutual co operation of members of the public in the domain of security
- ✓ The project envisages strengthening the Police by achieving the support of the local community. It is a project to professionally strengthen Police and increase its accessibility to the needy public

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<sup>11</sup> Prakash Singh, “Towards a people's police”, The Little Magazine, <http://www.littlemag.com/security/prakashsingh.html>

<sup>12</sup> Justice K.T. Thomas Commission, appointed by the Government of Kerala to suggest Police Reforms submitted its report in 2006. The report recommended that the Government should implement Community Policing on an experimental basis. Accordingly the Government asked the Police Department to prepare and submit a draft scheme. The draft scheme submitted by the Department in 2007 was discussed elaborately at various levels and based on suggestions/recommendations by various persons a final project was prepared by the Police Department.

through close interaction with and better understanding of the public.<sup>13</sup>

Government of Kerala launched Janamaithri Suraksha Project in 20 selected Police Stations in March, 2008. As on today Janamaithri Suraksha Project is implemented in 248 Selected Police Stations (20 Police Stations in 2008, 23 Police Stations in 2009, 105 Police Stations in 2010 and 100 Police Stations in 2012). The project has made tremendous impact on Kerala Society. Further a number of initiatives such as establishment of Coastal Vigilance Committees, Road Safety Programmes, etc. are being implemented in the State. These programmes also are based on the philosophy, principles and practices of Community Policing. Since Community Policing involves a philosophy of policing which is distinct from the traditional approach to policing, it is of crucial importance that appropriate training inputs are given for developing the right attitude and for imparting the relevant knowledge and skills.

In order to popularize the concept of Janamaithri Project, Janamaithri Kendrams were opened in District and Battalion Headquarters. These centres help people to come and interact with police. These centres have become extremely popular with the public. Janamaithri Suraksha Project seeks the responsible participation of the citizens in crime prevention at the level of the local community, conserving the resources, both of the community and of the police, in fighting against crimes which threaten the security of the community. Experience shows that by seeking the active co-operation of the public in performance of police duties, the process of Law Enforcement has become far more effective.<sup>14</sup>

Suresh Khopade<sup>15</sup> an IPS officer is widely known as the father of community policing in India. Mohalla Committee - also known as Mohalla

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<sup>13</sup> For further readings see Official website of the Kerala Police at <http://www.keralapolice.org/newsite/janamaithri.html>

<sup>14</sup> Supra note 11

<sup>15</sup> Suresh Khopade was born in Maharashtra on 1st June 1951 and joined Maharashtra police as Deputy Superintendent of police (direct nominee) in 1978 and retired in 2011. He is recipient of the President's Gallantry Medal for his courage in a near fatal encounter with interstate criminals. He has also been awarded the Police Medal for Meritorious Service. He is a pioneer and breakthrough innovator in the realm of policing and public administration in India, esp. in Community Policing. His Mohalla Committee (part of his Bhiwandi Experiment) is nationally and internationally acclaimed. His work in finding a solution to the problem of Ethnic and Religious strife and riots in the country has been hailed by national and international experts, sociologist, political scientists, civil society, journalists, and politicians. Renowned Scholar Professor Ashutosh Varshney called Mr Khopade's work in Bhiwandi 'miraculous'.

Peace Committee or Neighbourhood Peace Committee. It is the very first successful community policing experiment in the country. The whole country went up in flames after the demolition of the so called Babri Masjid. Mumbai burned twice. Yet, not a stone was thrown in Bhiwandi, known for serious communal riots that happened there in 1960, 1965, 1970, 1984.

Hundreds of lives and property worth crores was thus saved and the entire credit has been given to the Mohalla Committees and related schemes that Suresh Khopade implemented as the Police chief of Bhiwandi. Mohalla Committee has now been hailed as the panacea for Ethnic conflict. Suresh Khopade has thus put forth a tested solution to the Hindu-Muslim conflict issue that India faces today.

## V. Conclusion

Looking forward for improved police public relations, one can say, it is not a daunting task but if initiatives like mentioned above are seriously undertaken than the tyranny of fear amongst the people for the police will vanish and that they will start treating police as their own people and a part of the community.

Thus, it is highly important that the citizen and the policeman understand and appreciate each other's problems and viewpoints. The citizen has definite obligations in this matter. He must realize that his security and welfare are, to a large measure, dependent upon the maintenance of an orderly society, which in turn is dependent upon the efficiency and prestige of the police

The policeman, on his part, must always remember that law enforcement is not an end in itself, but is rather a means to an end. That end is the maintenance of an orderly society that enjoys the support of law-abiding citizens.

No matter how well a police department is organized or how efficient and honest is its administration, it is judged by individual citizens, and consequently by the nature of its public contacts. Good public relations involve far more than saying-they involve doing. It is the policeman out on his beat, the police officer in a radio car or on a motor-cycle, and the desk officer or jailer in the station who make friends or enemies for the department. Though there are other influences involved, the police themselves are the most important factor in determining public attitudes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> G. Douglas Gourley, "*Police Public Relations*", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 291, *New Goals in Police Management* (Jan., 1954), pp. 135-142, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1030348>