

COMMUNITY POLICING: ROLE AND PERFORMANCE IN PUNJAB

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The modern system of government has three main organs i.e legislature, judiciary and executive which are responsible for the smooth running of the political system. Among these three, executive is the front face of governing mechanism, supported by its numerous agencies working in different spheres of administration. The police, is the most visible, influential agency of government. The success or failure of the government can be evaluated in terms of performance and behavior of the police. The importance of police is more than other agencies of executive because the only police is main agency assigned with role to maintain law and order in the territory and without it no government and state can sustain itself. Police is peculiar in the sense that it is both a part of executive as well as judicial system. Having a long history and passing through different stages of development in different countries in different spans of time, police by nature became a coercive, suppressive and violent. As a result, the gap between public and police started widening and eventually the need was felt for Community Policing. Although, the concept of policing developed in Developed countries and slowly was introduced in Developing countries of Asia and Africa also. India being one of largest democracy, witnessed number of changes and slowly moved towards Community Policing.

This paper aims to analyze the meaning, evolution, mechanisms, challenges, and future prospects of community policing in India, with a critical focus on Punjab. It will examine whether community policing can truly act as a bridge between state authority and grassroots participation in regions with complex political and security dynamics. An attempt is also made to examine the structure, strategies, and implementation of Community Policing in Punjab. Further, the challenges and limitations being faced in executing Community Policing initiatives. This study employs a qualitative research methodology, relying on secondary sources such as government reports, academic journals, police department publications, and media articles focusing upon the concept and implementation of Community Policing in India, with a specific focus on Punjab. A descriptive and analytical approach is adopted to understand the historical evolution, institutional mechanisms, and practical challenges of community policing.

The system of Policing is not new and its roots can be traced back in times of Kautalya, although that was different from modern uniformed system of Police. At the same time such developments in the formation of Police were taking place across planet but England took the lead in developing the institution of police. By eighteenth century, the system of police was marked by severe penalties, poor system of investigation and enforcement mechanism (Reiner,200:16). The process of industrialization and urbanization brought big chunk of population to cities which provide fertile ground for criminal activities in cities and emphasized on the need of disciplined and more organized police system. The novelist and lawyer Henry Fielding in the 1750s advocated police reforms (Reiner, 2000:17). Jeremy Bentham, Patrick Colquhoun and Edwin Chadwick played a significant role in transforming police from violent institution to socially acceptable means of control and interaction (Shane,1980:13). After passing through number of ups and downs ultimately the credit of making Police, a uniformed force, goes to Sir Robert Peels in 1861. It laid down the mark stone for modern day Policing system.

The socio, economic and political circumstances changed drastically during the era of Industrial revolution. As an outcome of this development, India became one of the colony of English. Before the advent of British, the administration in Indian sub-continent was controlled by landlords through *jagirdari system* but the deterioration in social control and ineffectiveness of local administrative mechanism forced English rulers to take over reigns of administration into their hands. Therefore, in 1792, the administrative powers were snatched from landlords and handed over to Governor General (Shane, 1980:18). The War of Independence of 1857 further strengthened Police with more draconian powers and rules. The Indian Police Act of 1861, passed by English, is the foundation on which modern day Indian Police system is standing. Another important event for shaping police system was Fraser commission of 1902 which analysed the gaps and weaknesses in Police.

After independence, the role, structure, functioning and behaviour of Police remained more or less same like that of colonial era. Even after the period of hundred years, Government of India document of 2002 revealed the same flaws in police mechanism as were highlighted by Fraser Commission in 1902. The document highlighted the arbitrary arrests, violation of human rights, crime and politics nexus underlined colonial behaviour of Police. The Police still bank on psychological fear and maintaining gap from general public (Mishra,2024:6).

The post-colonial nature of Police was unacceptable to the people of independent democratic India and as a result the rift between Public and Police started widening day by day. The leaders at the top of hierarchy were concerned about this development and felt the need for Community Policing. The philosophy behind reforms done by Sir Robert Peel was also to make Police people centric and service oriented. The developed countries of the west incorporated this ideal into their Policing system. The major objective of Community Policing was to identify the problem requiring public attention, taking inputs from public and involving them in planning and implementation and getting feed backs from the community (Mishra,2024:9).

In India, the complexity of law enforcement is heightened by the country's vast diversity, regional disparities, and historical experiences with internal conflict. Against this backdrop, community policing becomes a vital tool in enhancing citizen trust, improving intelligence gathering, and creating an atmosphere of mutual cooperation between law enforcement and the public. This model not only facilitates the resolution of local issues through community input but also checks the misuse of police power and promotes transparency and accountability (Verma, 2005:3).

Punjab presents a particularly intriguing case. Having undergone a prolonged phase of insurgency and counter-insurgency during the 1980s and 1990s, the police-public relationship in Punjab has been marred by deep mistrust and fear due to the widespread abuse of police powers during that time (Singh,2007:3). In the post-militancy era, community policing initiatives were introduced to rebuild the fractured trust between the state and its citizens. However, Punjab continues to face several challenges including political interference, corruption, and external threats such as cross-border terrorism, all of which have impacted the effectiveness of such initiatives (Kumar, 2011:3).

Community policing has emerged as one of the most innovative and participatory strategies for administering law and order in contemporary democratic societies. It represents a paradigm shift from traditional, hierarchical, and enforcement-heavy models of policing to a more decentralized, cooperative, and citizen-oriented approach. At its core, community policing is built on the belief that public safety is not the sole responsibility of the police but a shared task involving the community at large (Rosenbaum, 1994: 3).

Community policing is both a philosophy and an operational strategy that emphasizes a proactive partnership between the police and the public to prevent crime and address safety concerns. It is rooted in principles of problem-solving, decentralization, and trust-building (Rosenbaum, 1994:7). At its core, community policing shifts the role of law enforcement from a reactive force to a collaborative service, seeking to enhance public safety through local engagement.

The origins of community policing can be traced back to Western democracies in the 1970s, where rising urban crime and strained police-public relations necessitated reforms. These reforms led to a reorientation of policing as a public service rather than a coercive force. In India, although informal systems of community involvement had existed under traditional village councils and local governance, formal models of community policing began to emerge only in the 1990s (Kumar, 2011:5). The move was prompted by an overburdened police force, increasing public mistrust, and the recognition that localized, participatory approaches could be more effective in ensuring law and order.

At the national level, the National Police Commission and the Padmanabhaiah Committee on police reforms have repeatedly highlighted the need for decentralized, community-based policing frameworks. The mechanisms for implementing community policing in India vary across states but share certain common practices. These include the formation of Community Liaison Groups, Village Defense Committees, and deployment of beat constables to establish direct contact with residents. Public awareness camps, community meetings, and safety education programs are used to enhance cooperation and build trust (Verma, 2005:4). These mechanisms aim to make policing more accessible, responsive, and preventive in nature. Notable state-level initiatives include Kerala's "Janamaithri Suraksha Project," Tamil Nadu's "Friends of Police," and Gujarat's "Suraksha Setu," each tailored to regional contexts but unified by a common emphasis on police-community partnerships (Alexander, 2002:4).

In Punjab, community policing was introduced in the late 1990s and early 2000s during the post-militancy period. The prolonged phase of insurgency and counter-insurgency, particularly during the 1980s and early 1990s, when police forces were granted extraordinary powers under national security laws. This era left behind a deep legacy of fear and mistrust among citizens due to instances of extra-judicial killings and lack of accountability (Singh, 2007:3). Community policing initiatives in Punjab were intended to restore public trust and normalize relations between the police and the community.

However, the implementation of community policing in Punjab faces significant hurdles. First, the legacy of absolute power exercised during the militancy era continues to hinder trust-building efforts. Citizens often view the police with suspicion, and this impedes open cooperation. Second, Punjab's vulnerability to cross-border terrorism, rising gangsterism, and political interference further complicates efforts at decentralization and community engagement (Kumar, 2011:5). The continued influence of Pakistan-based groups and recurring incidents of drug smuggling and separatist propaganda amplify security concerns and reduce public confidence in participatory policing models. Moreover, corruption within the police and administrative systems undermines the legitimacy of community policing, creating a disconnect between the objectives of reform and ground-level execution. Central government interventions in state policing matters have also been criticized for limiting the autonomy of local forces, which is essential for genuine community collaboration (Verma, 2005:5).

Despite these challenges, there remains a compelling need to institutionalize Community Policing in Punjab. After the formation of Beant Singh Government in Punjab in 1992, a claim was made that the people of Punjab have chosen the representative government despite warnings and violent attempts by

militants to hinder this democratic process. Therefore, the militant groups are marginalized. The primary task for the government was to rebuild confidence of people in police force and first step was taken in this sphere was by organizing cultural events by the police. The national and local renowned artists of films and singers were invited for the shows and people were invited by the Police to prove their proximity with people and show that terrorism was story of the gone days. The higher police officials organized public meetings to reduce the gap and mistrust of the people. These steps reraild the public-police relationship and public started helping police to curb the left menace of terrorism. As an outcome of this exercise, the flow of inputs about terrorists increased and public itself started fighting against militants. The Police extended full support and protection to such people by providing them gun men and most sophisticated and automatic weapons. Such efforts yielded positive results and militancy was marginalized in the state.

The Institute For Development and Communication (IDC) Chandigarh played initial role in the starting of Community Policing model by conducting various research and seminars and workshops and came out with institutionalized Community Policing model named as Community Policing Resource Centre (CPRC) which later on became popular by the name SAANJH. Initially, these Centers were established in seven districts and by 2004 all the districts were covered. To make it a sustainable project, legislative directive for the formation of these Centers was incorporated in section 14 of the new Punjab Police Act of 2007. In 2010, CPRC program was extended to subdivision and police station level. Furthermore, to strengthen this project Community Affairs Division (CAD) headed by ADGP and State Level Coordination and Review Committee (SLCRC) were established at police headquarter. Taking leap forward, the SAANJH kendras were made functional in 27 districts, 114 sub-divisions and 363 police stations by 2019 (Bureau of Police Research and Development,2021:20&21).

The SAANJH Kendras are assigned with tasks in four major domains for building trust between public and police. It includes, (i) providing Police Services, (ii)dispute resolution, (iii) providing psychological relief to victims and (iv) redressal of grievances. The SAANJH kendras provide 43 services to general public starting from renewal of arms license, issuing of NOC for pre-owned vehicles, copy of FIR, to Permission of Addition of cartridges. Apart from it, the complaints related to domestic violence, NRIs, matrimonial conflicts etc. are handled by SAANJH committees in very congenial and friendly environment which is quite different from police settings. The paper work for pursuing legal action by the victims of crime is also done by the team at SAANJH kendras further help in trust building. The team is well trained in handling victims psychologically thus providing them relief. (Bureau of Police Research ,2021: 22,23, 24)

The Impacts of the way of working of SAANJH kendras prove that they are successfully bringing people and police close by building trust and respect for Police. It had reduced the burden of Police stations by taking 43 activities into its domain and helped in making police more efficient in operational and other areas. The SAANJH kendras, the front face of Community Policing had Launched various APPs like **Shakti, Know Your Police, PP SAANJH** which provide safety to women and disseminate information about specialized services being provided by them. Moreover, various community meetings and seminars provide information about traffic rules, rights of the citizens and gather public support for curbing the menace of drugs, gangsterism and other illegal activities of the anti-social elements. The polite nature and civil uniform of the staff at SAANJH kendras removes psychological fear from the minds of general public which they used to normally experience during their interaction with police at police stations.

To sum up, it had been observed that restoring citizen trust in the police is essential not only for better crime prevention but also for the long-term sustainability of peace and democratic governance (Alexander,2002:7). Reducing dependence on force-centric, top-down policing strategies in favor of intelligence-based, locally rooted interventions can enhance public cooperation and information flow. The future prospects for community policing in India include the adoption of digitally enabled platforms such as mobile apps and helplines for reporting grievances and safety concerns. Engaging youth through educational programs and volunteer partnerships, along with strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms, can also improve public confidence. State police departments must explore transparent and community-focused practices that reduce the distance between law enforcement and the public. community policing in India represents a much-needed shift from authoritarian to participatory governance in the realm of law enforcement. While the approach holds immense promise, particularly in complex states like Punjab, its success depends on overcoming deep-rooted structural, political, and historical obstacles. The unique challenges faced by Punjab—ranging from the lingering effects of militancy to ongoing security threats—require a carefully tailored, context-specific model of community policing that balances vigilance with openness. The way forward involves a commitment to training officers in community engagement, institutionalizing transparency and accountability, and linking local governance mechanisms with police efforts. Only through consistent implementation and genuine public participation can community policing transform from a theoretical model into an effective and trusted component of India's policing system.

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