

Building People's Trust: A Comparative Study of Police - Community Relationship in Two Cities of Eastern India

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Abstract

The 21st century civil society aspires to have a resilient alliance with the law enforcement agencies in general and the police in particular. Endeavours of the police to reach out to the people can guarantee security and enhance the concern of the people in policing the society at large. However, the relationship between the police and the people continue to remain strained and distant. The police commissionerates of the capital cities of Bhubaneswar and Guwahati (both in eastern India) have undertaken community policing initiatives to build the trust of the people in law enforcement. A strong bond between the police and the public can ensure the success of the community policing programmes in achieving the desired aim. However, the real ordeal about awareness and participation of the people in the collaborative efforts of the police is less than satisfactory. The present empirical study compares the perception of the people about the nature of police-public relationship in these two cities of Eastern India.

Keywords: Community Policing, Police Commissionerates, law enforcement.

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INTRODUCTION

In India, perception about police-public relationship is a less traversed path in research and literature. Initiatives to augment the relationship between the police and the people have either failed to attract the people or have disappeared for not meeting the desired results. Public involvement in policing activities can foster improved and more sustainable societies. Concern for the community and delivering service for the people both by the police and the public can foster commendable development and safe neighborhoods. This requires both the police and the people to join hands and come out of the cocoons by shedding inhibitions to create peaceful communities. The two states of Odisha and Assam in Eastern India are unparalleled not only in landscape, vegetation and fauna but also because of its well-defined cultural identity. In spite of this, these two states are triggered by internal and external disturbances, require the police and the people complimenting each other in peacekeeping. People's participation in policing and more specifically police's participation in problem solving can reduce the risk of turmoil. The easy resort to make this relationship formidable is through community policing initiatives which can bring the police and the public in close quarters to make the community safe and secure.

In order to carve a niche in the success story, Community policing requires a professional body with soft skills and adept in handling new technologies to ensure enhanced police public interaction. However, in India, the police forces are still struggling to prove their credentials of professionalism and so community policing is nothing but a mere slogan [1-3]. In India, a flourishing police community alliance has not developed because of its heterogeneity. Diversity in ethnicity acts as an impediment in developing unity of purpose and interests among the people. Again the police in India carry the colonial legacy of being authoritative and oppressive. In view of continuous extreme left wing or terrorist movements and violence, the issues of special force and rule of law is a matter of concern in the eastern states of India. Thus we have observed presence of The Assam Rifles and Indo-Tibetan Border Force in the North East. In these background the study on community policing at its operational level is very much significant and desirable also. Further, a developing city, Bhubaneswar the capital of Odisha is undergoing a quick rise in population mainly students and professionals from different parts of India. The police commissionerate initiated community policing programmes to bond with the society and build sustainable communities. Participative policing can ensure safety of the people through public empowerment. In this regard, the present

study is an attempt to compare the views of the people of Bhubaneswar and Guwahati about whether the police have been able to build the trust to make police-community relationship formidable in both the cities.

Police, Policing and Police-Community Relationship: Concepts, Relevance and Impediments

Policing involves a conscious exercise of coercive power – undertaken by individuals and organizations, where such activities are viewed by them and by others as a central or key defining part of their purpose of order maintenance, peacekeeping or law enforcement, crime investigation and prevention and other forms of investigation and associated information brokering [4]. The police is a organized body of civil officers in a city, town or district whose specific responsibilities are the maintenance of order, the prevention and detection of crime, and law enforcement [5]. The word police is used to determine the institution of social control which tries to forbid crime and disorder and maintain peace [6].

Policing may vary through public view of police credibility and authority, perception of police utility, police-public allegiance, principal programs and technologies adopted. The political era of police through the evolution of municipal police forces in the 1840s and continued until the early 1900s when there was a close association between police and politics. Police were the enforcers and enablers of political machinery. Officer positions were appointed not on qualifications but based on bribes, nepotism and political appointments. In this system police and political leaders had frequent contact and communications. Corruption was rampant due to the high discretionary powers of the officers and their intimate relationship with the community. The reform era of policing (1930s-1970s) is said to be both a response to the corruption in political era and scientific management. It observed crime fighting approach, routine patrol, quick response to people and most importantly criminal investigation. There was emphasis on organization and structure, efficiency and autonomy. There was technological development followed by police taking their beats on cars. The community policing era began in late 1970s and developed during last three decades of 20th century and continues in the 21st century. The community policing era is marked by close police and public association, importance to quality of life and problem solving and decentralization in police organization. This era is characterized by an emphasis on the relationship with the community, foot beats and other highly accessible patrol tactics and programmes which include in community in crime solving. During this era the police become more concerned to community problems and that is why the era is also known as *problem solving era*. Increasing rate in crime, the enhanced isolation of the police from the community, complaints of police barbarity and impassivity, especially towards minority communities

led to the evolution of community policing [7, 8]. Problem-solving policing enlists reasoning and innovativeness in addressing crime and other community concerns. On the other hand, community policing explicitly identifies community issues of concern and community support, priorities in partnerships and restoring security. Community policing solves neighborhood necessity, reduces victimization and increases police accountability to craft progressive functional relationships. In exercise, the two approaches tend to become one [9].

Curiosity on people's opinion of the police began in 1960s as an outcome of urban violence in United States. The civil rights movements and anti war protests brought to light conflict in police-public relations [10, 11]. Community oriented policing actually evolved out of two early experimental foot patrol programs in Newark, New Jersey, and Flint, Michigan. Foot patrol officers were used as a plan of action to include officers directly in community problem solving whereby the officers were trained to do far more than to deter crime [12]. Precisely, the police are the public and the public are the police. The essential obligation of the police officer is to improve community life. The idea of community policing first appeared in the writings of H. Goldstein [13] in his work 'Improving Policing: A Problem-Oriented Approach' in the journal '*Crime and Delinquency*'. Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving is a proactive philosophy that promotes resolution of issues that are criminal, destructive, increase fear of crime, as well as other community problems [14].

Community policing (a) depends on structural decentralization and a reconstruction of patrolling to encourage police-public communication; (b) adopts a commitment towards problem-oriented policing; (c) ensures that police react to the public precedence and develop their plan of action and (d) a determination to resolve incidents of crime in neighbourhoods independently through community groups and crime-prevention initiatives [15]. The community and the police is an organic whole with mutually supportive partnership, where neither the community nor the police can insulate negativity [6]. Terrorism and transnational crime, organized crime and corruption have shifted the nature of the law enforcement structures, functions and practices causing serious threats to policing [16]. Police officers must be motivated and ideate the crime trend issues of the community before they become challenging. Hence, community policing officers are required to act as intelligent agents of the criminal justice who respond both rationally and emotionally to people's problems [17]. Strain between police and the people can be belittled by recruiting more minority officers, conducting awareness drives to officers about cultural diversity, avoiding police use of force, transparent grievance redressal, creating steady beat patrolling and initiating problem-oriented policing [18].

However, the great difficulty to implement community policing is to take unfamiliar and challenging responsibilities by the officers. The police officers have to gratify both their superior officers as well as the people which may cause role conflict between their work culture and the modern reformation of police work. The nature of work connected with community policing requires the officers to do many unfamiliar and challenging responsibilities. Moreover, the officers have to do many of their old jobs in new ways. They are also required to solve a broad range of problems of the community as an added responsibility. The difficulty and challenge before the police officers is that it is beyond their capabilities as most of them were selected and recruited for performing traditional roles [19]. A study conducted in a municipal police department in Florida shows that lack of resources, time constraint and organizational culture are constraints to the implementation of community policing [20]. According to Kumar [21] community policing has an opportunity cost and a trade-off to distribute resources resulting in deviation of assets utilized in normal police station from routine police work to community policing.

Moreover, the rising number of cybercrime has also posed a threat to policing as such and more particularly community policing. Cyber crime is complex and difficult for police to address through either traditional forms of policing or community policing. First, the computer itself can be targeted for unlawful reasons; second, the computer can be used as a mechanism for criminal activity and third, the computer can be used as a secondary means for committing a crime. It is rather easy to commit but difficult to detect. The effect of cybercrime is widespread and has the potential to devastate a diverse population of individual and businesses. Hence the police must shift from a reactive position to a more proactive position in order for community policing to adequately address cybercrime [22].

In India, community policing is operative through some programmes and not as a philosophy. The National Police Commission 1970 showed concern for the strained relationship between the police and the community. In 1980 the NPC motivated the police to work patrolling operations and traffic maintenance to bond with the people. However these initiatives even though implemented with with sound intention suffered several drawbacks like disparity in conceptualization and implementation, want for policy support, deficiency of cognizance about community policing, use of circumspection in participative policing, need of right inclination and belief, stained persona of the police and inferior self-effectivity of the police officers [23].

Objectives of the Study

The present study seeks to evaluate whether the police in Bhubaneswar and Guwahati have won

over the people trust through effective community oriented services and have become a *people's police*.

Again, to ensure public involvement we need to have an empowered '*police's people*'. A comparative study of the views of the people of Bhubaneswar and Guwahati about their awareness and joint involvement in community services is made. The study evaluates the know- how and interest of the people in community policing in Bhubaneswar and Guwahati and explores the impact of ICTs in making these cooperative initiatives successful.

Methodological Orientation

(a) Universe of the study

The citizens of Guwahati in Assam in the North- East of India and Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha in Eastern India is the universe of the study.

(b) Area of Research

The area of research is Guwahati in Assam and Bhubaneswar in Odisha.

Guwahati is an ancient urban area which lies between the banks of the Brahmaputra River and the foothills of the Shillong plateau. Guwahati, also known as the "The City of Temples" due to the presence of many ancient temples in the city. The Police Public ratio in the state of Assam is 1:710 while that for Odisha is 1:764 [24]. The Guwahati Police is a new Commissionerate established on 1st January, 2015 operating through 21 Police Stations. Assam Police has *Nagarik Committee* in Guwahati city whose main principle is 'watch thy neighbour'. It has also Community Liason Group which hold regular meeting with eminent political and non-political personalities and the police.

Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha, too has over one thousand temples has earned the tag of the 'Temple City of India'. It secured the top rank in the Smart City list in India [25]. The twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack have a joint police commissionerate. In comparison to the twin city of Cuttack, the crime statistics of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack in 2015 as published by the Police Commissionerate shows that Bhubaneswar has a crime rate higher in respect to major offences like rape, murder, public order crime, swindling, property crime than its counterpart, Cuttack [26]. The city of Bhubaneswar has 22 police stations with one women police station. The Commissionerate holds regular police public interface with people from different sections of the society. It has appointed Special Police Officers (SPOs) to promote public order and security in the community, help victims of road accidents, distressed people, evening and night patrolling and share information about the community with other police officers of the locality. With the purpose of providing safety and security to the senior citizens the police commissionerate has Senior Citizen's Security

Cells (SCSC) whose officers regularly visit senior citizens, track their tenants and domestic helps and assist them in solving their personal problems [27].

(c) Sampling Frame

The present exploratory study has no sampling frame and non-probability sampling techniques were employed to collect primary data.

(d) Sampling Procedure

Non-Probability quota sampling has been used to collect primary information. "Non-probability sampling may be used effectively in studies that seek to explore ideas that are still underdeveloped" [28]. "Quota Samples are non-probability samples in which sub-samples are selected from clearly defined groups. Groups are defined and the sizes specified, and then individuals who fit those descriptions are selected to fill the quotas wherever they are found" [10]. The quotas have been constructed taking into consideration the criteria of sex that is male and female.

(e) Units of Observation and Sampling Size

The sample is of 200 respondents (100 from each of the cities) with an equal division of male, female is maintained in this regard.

(f) Methods of Data Collection and Data Analysis

In this exploratory study of a small sample survey, primary data has been collected through direct face to face interview through structured interview schedule with both closed ended and open-ended questions to collect the relevant information. Government Reports have also been used to collect relevant information. Secondary data has been collected by studying the websites of the police organizations of the north-eastern states of India. Encyclopedia, books, newspaper reports, journals and articles in magazines have been used to collect data. After coding, the data has been quantitatively represented through univariate tables followed by analysis of the same.

The Police and the People: A Study

About the Sample

Bhubaneswar

- The sample comprised of 50 male and 50 female respondents.
- Thirty male and 25 female were between the age group of 18-39 years. The rest were between 40 to 60 years of age.
- Fifty four percent of the female respondents were married and 42% of the male respondents were single.
- Thirty seven of the male and 29 women respondents had a graduation and a higher degree.
- Thirty nine males and 21 females were employed. Out of the 60 employed, 39 were working in private agencies.

Guwahati

- Out of the 100 respondents, 50 were men and 50 women.
- Thirty five of the respondents were of the age group of 25-31 years. 86% of the respondents were between 18-60 years of age. Only 14 were senior citizens.
- Fifty five of the respondents had a graduate degree out of which 30 were women. Out of 11 postgraduates seven were women.
- Sixty five of the respondents were employed. 27 were self employed, 29 were in private sectors and only nine were in government jobs. The number of employed men is more than employed women.

The People's Police

To develop a close bonding with the society the police needs to restore the faith of the people - wherein the people will feel free to go to the police, visit police stations in crisis and consider the police to be one amongst them.

- Sixty percent women and 48% men in the city of Bhubaneswar are unsatisfied with the police. In the city of Guwahati 64% of the male and 68% women are happy with the city police.
- Fifty eight percent of the men and 72% women in Bhubaneswar believed that the police do not have any contribution towards community service. However 90% of the sample found the absence of the city police in community oriented service in Guwahati.
- More than 50% of the men in both the cities have an acquaintance in police stations. Compared to that the percentage of women is less who still feel uncomfortable to visit police officers. Hence 58% of women in Bhubaneswar and 70% women in Guwahati have never visited a police station.
- Still today, about 40 years after the concept of community oriented policing has been in vogue about 50% of the residents in both the cities feel that law and order maintenance is the most important responsibility of the police.
- About 60% of the residents with an exception of about 40% of the female in Guwahati feel that police inflicts severe harm on a suspect. So the colonial stigma of using physical force and coercion still go hand in hand in so far as today's police is concerned.
- About 70% of the residents in both the cities believe that the police-media relationship is strained.

The Police's People

More so, in order to improve the relationship with the people, the police needs to make them aware about their programmes, initiatives and their mission to

help the society and the cooperation that they need from the people.

- In both Bhubaneswar and Guwahati there is a lack of awareness about community service programmes of the police. However in Guwahati less than 10% were unaware about community policing programmes of the city police. Lack of awareness about community policing initiatives is far less among women.
- During festivals, night ward and watch and everyday foot beat patrolling, the presence of the police is felt in community service. However even though foot beat patrol is a part of community policing it is done mainly to prevent crime. The direct interaction of the police and the people can be possible in all these services. Assam Police has *Nagarik Committee* in Guwahati city whose main principle is 'watch thy neighbour'. It has also Community Liaison Group which hold regular meeting with eminent political and non-political personalities and the police.
- Ninety six percent of the respondents from Guwahati did not harp the benefits of community policing initiatives. This may be because there is lack of public awareness and involvement in the community development programmes is the need of the hour.
- Eighty percent of the women in Bhubaneswar and 98% of the women in Guwahati felt that the police was required to treat vulnerables like women, children and elderly with a soft touch.
- The public participation in the community service programmes in both the cities is sparse. These initiatives if undertaken can be successful only if the police and the people join hands in the community development. However 91% of the respondents from Guwahati were interested to join hands with the police in the community development initiatives. This zeal among the people to participate in community development services should be harnessed.
- In Bhubaneswar, 98% of the residents have identified the need for community policing programmes. 86% of the residents were interested to actively participate in the community policing programmes. Only 34 of the 100 residents have benefitted from the community service drives of the commissionerate.
- In Guwahati, 95% of the women felt the need for community policing initiatives. Assam is showing a rapid increase in the number of cases of domestic violence. Therefore, it may be that women are feeling insecure and wants the police to be more involved in knowing its community so that crime can be checked.
- In both the cities the residents, 90% of the men and more than 70% of the women felt that

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can improve the bond between the police and the people and play a constructive role in police-community liaison initiatives. Since 90% of the residents were using mobile telephones they felt that mobile telephones can be a very effective medium of communication between the police and the people.

- In both the cities the awareness about e services of the police is less than satisfactory. In Bhubaneswar less than 25% of the sample residents were aware about the e services of the city police while in Guwahati less than 80% were unaware about the e services of the police. E services include police website, contact email id, SMS service etc. This shows that the police lacks transparency in percolation of information to the people because of which people still have inhibitions, fear and doubts in reaching out to the police.

Concluding Remarks

Community Policing makes the governance of security participative and responsible thereby improving the urban security environment. Further, these programmes increase the people's confidence in the police and improve police sensitivity to citizen's security concerns [29]. Police-public interaction in India is still rigid, obstinate and cold. Dispur/Guwahati is in no way different. In spite of having several community policing programmes they have not been beneficial and the masses are unaware of them. Even though people expect the police to take part in community service, the people's participation has been sparse. The people have shown an interest in participating in community policing initiatives and this should be harnessed through proper awareness and publicity. In this regard, new communication technologies can be utilized to reach out to the people. The drive towards community policing can showcase and bring forth the younger generation in community-building activities and thereby check vagrancy, isolation and alienation. The police can too reap the benefits of having more manpower and more eyes to keep a vigil.

The Police Commissionerate of Bhubaneswar is working with 22 police stations with one women police station. There are special directives to the police to deal with women related issues. Again there is also police public interface with different stakeholders like auto drivers, hotel owners, restaurateur, school authorities to identify and solve their problems and ensure proper safety and security measures. Even elderly citizens are also taken care of and regularly visited by the police officers of the local police stations. The concept of '*aamo police*' or '*our police*' has also been initiated by the police.

However, many of the community policing initiatives of the police goes unnoticed and there is inadequate percolation of information about the services. The crime rate in Bhubaneswar is much more than Cuttack. The philosophy of community policing has still not grasped police work. It is just a set of programmes. The policies for empowering the masses by involving them in police work is absent. As a result the people too are not much conversant with the idea of community policing. Mere interest to participate is not enough. There should be proper opportunities, scope and information among the people to do so.

The findings indicate that there is lack of awareness among the people about these initiatives and the police has also failed to incorporate or empower the people in policing adequately. Again the trust and faith of the people in the police is far from satisfactory. Hence the police has to initiate the following measures to make the philosophy of community policing thriving:

- To get out of the cocoon more proactive policies of public inclusion is required and proper utilization of the human resource is the need of the hour. This will make the people beneficiaries and equal collaborators in police work.
- Proper promotion of the community policing initiatives can make the people develop confidence over the police work and help to get rid of the doubts, fear and apathy that they have towards the police.
- The police officers should also be sensitised about the philosophy of community policing. This will help them to get out of a rigid police culture and imbibe the values of a people-friendly police force.
- Knowing your community police officer is also essential. The police officers incharge of every beat are required to be acquainted with every resident of the community and community should also be well versed with the officer incharge of his area. This will enhance transparency and accountability.
- Further, the police should be hands-on in using ICTs to reach out to the people. Website should be user friendly and informative. Social networking sites can also be exploited to spread information as well as procure peoples reaction towards any initiative. Enhanced and speedy dissemination of information and more public involvement can help them people-friendly and empower the public.

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