

Police and its Role in the Society

Anupam Sharma

*Associate Professor, Department of Political Science & Human Rights, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, (A Central University) Amarkantak 484886, Distt. Anuppur, Madhya Pradesh, India
E mail id: anupam.vishvesh@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

Police is an executive civil force of a state to which is entrusted the duty of maintaining public order and enforcing regulations for the prevention and detection of crime. The constant expansion of the functions of the state for development, democracy and welfare of the people, growing complexity of life and social relationship, imposed newer obligations on the police in modern society. Its role has been increasing also particularly with the development of technology which is making negative impact along with the positive aspect in the society. Today in contemporary society police has to perform variety of services and emergency functions, rather than simply doing crime prevention and detection & maintenance of law and order. Dependency of people on police has increased as they take help of police in even odd situation whether it is natural calamity or family disputes. Police today, not only provide security service rather it deliver many human and social services. Therefore in this changing scenario, to make police force more effective and efficient, social, political and economic changes are required to combat with the emerging problem of society so that people can feel safe in the society.

Keywords: Community, Crime, Police mission, Police–public meeting, Democracy, Prevention, Detection

INTRODUCTION

Etymologically speaking, the word ‘police’ is derived from the Greek word ‘polis’ meaning the city or the state. The regulations of market place was a major police function in ancient Greek and Roman societies (Uglow, 1988). But some thinkers argue that the word ‘police’ has come from the Greek word ‘politeia’ meaning ‘government’, ‘citizenship’. In this sense the term refers to that phase of government having to do with the protection of life and property, preservation of public tranquility and maintenance of order and the prevention and control of crime (Earayil and Vadackumchery, 1985). S.D. Trivedi observes, ‘the term ‘Police’ broadly connotes the purposeful maintenance of public order and protection of persons and property from the hazards of public accident and the commission of unlawful acts (Trivedi, 1993).

The Oxford Dictionary defines the police as “a system of regulation for the preservation of order and enforcement of laws of the internal government of a state”. Functionally, the police are an agency of the government which enforces law and keeps peace, being the external manifestation of the power of the state. In simple words, police is defined, in Encyclopedia Britannica, as “an executive civil force of a state to which is entrusted the duty of maintaining public order and enforcing regulations for the prevention and detection of crime”(Mathur, 1979). It is an organization of the state created and maintained by the state as most policing is done by people who are the direct and full time employees of the state. In order to perform the above mentioned functions police is empowered with legitimate force of the state. In the words of S.K. Chaturvedi, policeman is a citizen with powers necessary for the maintenance of the peace and welfare in the society (Chaturvedi, 1985).

ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF POLICE

A study on the role and functions of the police shows that they are too varied and complex to brought under a uniform design. The role of police in democratic societies is multi-dimensional. They perform complex and contradictory role. A police officer can be seen as crime fighter, bureaucrat, crowd controller, intelligence officer social officer simultaneously. Herman Goldstein and Donald J. Newman believe that the role and functions of the police are extraordinarily broad and complex. The task they perform are so entangled and interrelated that a clear cut separation between them is not possible. Nor, are the numerous conflicts among different aspects of their functions can be easily reconciled (Goldstein, 1975).

With now economic and political development function and role of police has been increasing in every society. During the early days, the main function of the police was to keep watch over the community, particularly night to ensure the safety and order of the community. James F. Ahen describes the changing role and duties of police units as follows:

“It is significant that police’s department first role was one of order maintenance rather that strict law enforcement. As the time went on, however, rising crime forced the changes in emphasis. The public conception of police roles shifted more from order maintenance to crime control and the police became regulated by a fixed set of societal ideals embodied in a code of laws” (Ahen, 1972).

CLASSIFICATION OF POLICE FUNCTIONS: SOME ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Many scholars have attempted to define and classify the functions of the police in modern society. One important analysis of the police role has been carried out by William P. Brown, who says that police deal with two broad problem areas—individual victimization and community interest (Table 1). The need to protect or deal with community interest can arise in

four different kinds of trouble some situation. These include (1) individual victimization due to drunken driving or illegal possession of revolver, (2) community victimization and due to drunker on account of illegal use of city streets, natural disasters, (3) community needs (other than 1 and 2 category), such a giving information, minor assistance, enforcement of traffic/municipal rules, and (4) dealing with community problem such as gambling, prostitution, alcoholism, drug addiction and so on. All these situations have the potential for social disorder (Leonard, 1980).

Table 1: William P. Brown’s analysis of police functions Problem Areas

1. Individual victimization	Resulting from crime Resulting from illness, accidental injury, misfortune, etc.	
2. Community interest	Individual victimization	Drunken driving, illegally carrying a revolver, etc.
	Community victimization	Illegal use of city streets natural disasters, etc.
	Non victimization related but objectively specified community need	Giving information and minor assistance, enforcing traffic and other municipal ordinance, etc.
	Mores maintenance	Dealing with gambling prostitution, alcohol and drug problems, etc.

Thomas AJ, Gordon EM and Lee PB have classified the police activities into two broad categories—criminal and non-criminal. They further divided each category into two classes—emergency and non-emergency. Table 2 shows the functions of the police (Thomas *et al.*, 1986).

Perhaps the most sophisticated and recent classification of the function of the police is the one attempted by Richard N. Holder. As below chart shows that he divides the police functions into four categories, namely (1) Order Maintenance, (2) Law Enforcement, (3) Emergency services, and (4) Crime Prevention (Holden, 1994).

After a detailed and comparative study of the police functions are come to the conclusion that their responsibilities have seldom been clearly defined. There are ambiguities in each of the classification which are discussed above. But no categorization does cover all police activities. Emphasis is placed mainly on the traditional function of police matters related to crime and maintenance of order by most of the experts. The current problems with the definitions of

Table 2: Classification of police functions

	Criminal	Non-Criminal
Emergency	Robbery in progress Hostage being held Homicide Kidnapping Hot burglary Jail escape	Child fell into storm sewer Man pinned under load Hospital fine Man jumping Factory explosion
Non-Emergency	Bad cheeks Larceny from newsstand Shop-lifting 'State' burglary Prostitution complaint Vandalism	Lost animal Found property Lock out Escort, except VIP Overtime, parking Minor vehicular accident

Table 3: Police Mission

Responsibilities/Purposes	
Function order maintenance	Providing for the community, sense of well-being through a police presence, assisting to maintain an orderly flow of traffic: guaranteeing the constitutional rights of all people, assisting those in need, identifying problems within the community, and resolving interpersonal conflicts.
Law enforcement	Providing for the safety of the public by enforcing violations of laws and ordinance committed in their presence: investigating criminal activity and bringing criminal suspects before the count of trial.
Emergency services	Providing rapid response to people in physical danger, both police protective services and emergency first aid to those in need of such series.
Crime prevention	Deterring criminal activity through the use of uniform patrol techniques, crime prevention programs, and selective enforcement techniques.

police function is the non-inclusion of service miscellaneous activities with the functional jurisdiction of police with the concept of democracy and welfare state role and functions of police are increasing in every field.

THE NEED OF POLICE

The importance of police cannot be underestimating. A time honored function and policing activity has been a universal necessity in every society at all point of time.

Threat to life liberty and property and need for order: The need for policing arises from the fact that there is always a threat to the life, liberty and property of people. During the early years, in the traditional societies, the purpose of police was to keep watch over the community, particularly during night time, to assure the safety, and order of the community. It, initially, developed as a protector to life, liberty and property of the people as a peace keeper to provide protective services to the community. Policeman in the early societies was not only performing a very simply task, but was considered as a part of the society. According to Baston, in the early day the Parish constable was simply 'a citizen on duty'. The British Policeman during that time was also a civilian discharging duties and merely put uniform so that those who need his help know exactly where to look for assistance (Banton, 1964).

Deviant behavior and need for social control: The need for police to control society was felt because of the deviant behavior in the society (Skyes, 1977). Though no human society has ever been totally free of deviant behavior. In the beginning, there were no police. There was no specialized organization whose duty was to maintain social control and to protect the innocent from transgressors. In the beginning people were their own police but with the advent of organized societies, rules of conduct become more formalized and penalties were prescribed for those who violated the rules. It is mainly the human nature which is responsible for the development of laws and to enforce them, its institutions like police courts, persons. Police forces were created, through a long process of development, in recognition of the need by society to have available some means of enforcing of conduct and protecting the innocent from those who would transgress against them (Charles, 1977).

Complexity of Life in Modern Society:- The more populated and complex the society becomes, the wider the range of social conduct which must be controlled by government through the exercise of its police power. The need of police is gradually increasing. Industrialization urbanization, increasing job and economic opportunities, due to process of developing in developed and developing nations have increased the need for police and its power and functions. However, there is a gradual change in the nature and duties and powers of the police which indicate the increasing need to police the society.

Expanding Role of the State:-Police is also required in a modern civilized and free society because of the expanding functions and powers of the state. As the role of the state has expanded so also the roles of police extend. The constant expansion in the functions of the state for development, democracy and welfare of the people and the growing complexity of life and social relationship imposed newer obligations on the police in modern society.

Police as Integral part of criminal justice system:-It is the need for a life free from crimes which ultimately gave birth to an organization called police. The Criminal Justice System, which is designed to ensure peace, tranquility, stability and probity in society, depends heavily on police to achieve this end. Police not only checks crime but also helps the Criminal Justice System in punishing the criminals. It saves the people from the criminals or anti-socials who act as a threat to the life and liberty of the people. The police remain and perhaps have to be the control agency of Criminal Justice Administration in all societies by virtue of the nature of its functions. The real quality of criminal justice is determined by the quality of commitment and performance of the police. It would not be an exaggeration to say that public order, peace and tranquility will be jeopardized in the absence of police in the society. Police exists for freedom-freedom from disorder and criminal acts. Therefore, police men are required for preserving law and order in the society. B.M. Mullick rightly asserts:-'Without the constant vigilance and directing hand of the policeman, man would degenerate into an animal and society would disintegrate and without the policeman's guiding influence, man would not conquer the animal to him and society would not prosper as a corporate body'(Srivastava, 1999).

Need for Crime Prevention & Control: -Besides order maintenance, in modern society, police perform the task of crime detection and prevention and law enforcement. It developed as a subsystem of the criminal justice system. A policeman is increasingly seen as an official exercising authority and power over citizens.

Today in contemporary society police perform varieties of services and emergency functions, rather than simply doing crime prevention and detection and maintenance of law and order. Dependency of people on police has increased as they take help of police in any odd situation whether it is natural calamity or family disputes. Police today, not only provide security service rather it deliver many human and social services.

Thus the need of police is justified on four grounds – first, it regulates the public behavior, traffic, conduct of public meeting, rallies, protest marches by political parties, students agitations, farmer's movements social cultural festivals held in public places, and during elections, second it protects the life, liberty and property of the people and provides internal security, third it assists, guides, helps the people in crisis and emergencies. Lastly, it is an indispensable law enforcement agency of the government for prevention and control of crime in the society.

Police force is performing several types of functions along with the prevention of crime and maintenance of law and order. With the passage of time its role has been increasing particularly with the development of technology which is making negative impact along with the positive aspect in the society. Social, political and economic changes are required changed police role which can combat with the problem of emerging society therefore people can feel safe and create the way of development in the country. Although every country is bringing changes accordingly but these situations demand that changes should take place in future perspective.

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