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RURAL POLICING
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India still lives in the villages. Though the trend towards urbanisation has been on the increase, yet the majority of Indians still reside in the villages. The CJS as obtained in the villages provides succour and relief to the villagers. The rural police being as important part of this CJS need to reorient themselves to serve the masses. Reforms are badly needed in the structure, orientation and style of functioning if rural police has to deliver.

In our country, most of the states have had different systems for village policing, even during the British rule. However, over a period of time, due to a variety of reasons, much of the traditional police system, that existed in the villages, has either become defunct or dysfunctional. Since a vast majority of the population lives in the villages, for improving the image of the police among the public, the problems of village policing have to be effectively addressed.

In the post-independence era, the compulsions for the effective tackling of the problems of policing in the rural areas have even increased further. As a result of the processes of democracy, growth of literacy, and social and economic development measures, the traditional power structures in the villages have been undergoing rapid changes. This has lead to the growth of potential for crime as well as conflict and chaos in the rural society. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that most of such places are remote from the headquarters of the district and the state. This is a dangerous situation, which has been effectively exploited, at places, by politically motivated groups, such as left-wing extremists.

The absence of an effective village police set-up has, indeed, proved to be the “Achilles’ heel” for effective policing of rural areas. Whatever arrangements existed during the pre-
independence period have also gradually become almost non-existent now, much to the
detriment of policing of such areas.
The NPC has dealt with this very crucial subject and has come act with some vital
recommendations which need to be implemented in right earnest if the CJS has to make
us impact in the rural setting. Those recommendations are reproduced below.

Village Police

Though the village chowkidar has become practically useless as far regular police
work is concerned, a total abolition of this system without an alternate scheme, equally
simple and inexpensive, for aiding police work in the village would create difficulties for
the regular police who now have in the village chowkidar at least one contact point,
however inefficient it may be, to attempt collection of information in any specific
situation. Since collection of information is a fundamental requisite of all field work in
the police, the police will be greatly handicapped if they do not have at the village level at
least one functionary who will have his ears to the ground and be a position to help them
with useful information whenever needed.

The village chowkidar system should not therefore, be given up altogether but
should be made to function effectively by eliminating the existing deficiencies and what
is more important linking it effectively with the functioning of a group also at the village
level. While the service of an individual functionary like to chowkidar would be required
on a continuing basis to keep a general vigil in the village form the police angle the
service of a group as such may be required only at intervals in specified situations. For
example, arranging crime prevention and relief work in a cyclone or flood affected area,
organising preventive measures against movements of dacoit gangs that might be
suspected at any particular time, arranging preventive patrols against sabotage of
communication lines or other vital installation that might lie in the rural area when there
is a threat of such sabotage, etc., are tasks for the performance of which a village level
defence group would be more effective than a lone village chowkidar.
The existing chowkidar system may be retained and strengthened with the following provisions built into the system:-

1. Minimum age limit of 20 years for appointment and maximum age limit of 60 years for remaining in service may be adopted.
2. Ability to read write the regional language should be insisted upon.
3. He should be a resident of the village. Preference should be given to a person having some avocation in the village that would give him the means of reasonable livelihood without total dependence on the remuneration he might get from Government.
4. He may be assigned some village common land for cultivation and enjoyment of its produce, subject to his continued functioning as chowkidar satisfactorily.
5. He should be under the administrative control of the Police Department and should be paid through them on a regular monthly basis.
6. His pay should be fixed at a reasonable level which would appear attractive by the standards of village economy.
7. He should not be involved in the performance of tasks concerning other Government departments. If the other departments require the service of a similar village level functionary for their purpose, they should be separately appointed and administered by them.
8. His duties will include
    a. General maintenance of vigil in the village from the point of view of crime prevention; and
    b. Being alert and sensitive to any intelligence regarding village affairs which are likely to lead to a law and order situation and pass on such intelligence promptly to the regular police.
9. He should also have powers to arrest and detain persons who may be either caught red handed while committing certain specified offences in the village or may be
found in possession of property in the circumstances which create the suspicion of the commission of any of the specified offences. The chowkidar will hand over to the regular police without delay any person so arrested along with the property seized from if any.

Besides the village chowkidar there should be village defence parties organized in such a manner that they can be got together whenever an occasion needs their services for collective action to deal with any specific situation in the village. They may be organised for one village or a group of villages as may be found operationally convenient. One of the members of the village defence party should be designated as the dalapati who will function as their leader. The village chowkidar shall ex officio, be a member of the village defence party. The organization and set up of the village defence party and the dalapati including the procedure for their appointment and administrative control and their duties and responsibilities may be broadly on the lines of the Karnataka pattern as details in paragraphs 20.6 to 20.11 of the report.

While the administrative control over the village defence parties and dalapatis will remain with the police, it would be desirable to associate a functionary at the Panchayat Union or Block level in the Panchayat administration in exercising supervision over the work of dalapatis.

It would greatly facilitate prompt exchange of information relevant to their tasks if a residential telephone were provided for the dalapati in each village defence party wherever technically feasible. In fact this telephone can function in the manner of a public call office which would also facilitate its use by the other members of the village community in an emergency. Such facility would greatly enhance the status of the dalapati and his utility to the village community. Government may consider the grant of an advance to help purchase of cycles by the members of the village defense parties including the chowkidar. The grant of a small allowance to the chowkidar for the maintenance of his cycle may also be considered.
The scheme of village policing as detailed in this report envisages a comprehensive set up including the village chowkidar, village defence parties and the dalapati with appropriate administrative and supervisory control measures to secure the ultimate objective of the system, namely effective involvement of the village community in self defence, besides co-operating with the regular police in the performance of police tasks. Village chowkidar are at present functioning in some states under a separate Act enacted a long time age. Village defence parties have been set up in a few states under some recent legislation. We recommended the legislation of separate comprehensive Act by the State Government to set up the village police system including both as proposed.

I have no doubt that the prescription of the NPC will go a long way in improving the efficacy of CJS in the rural areas. The reforms suggested in the chowkidar system, the beat constable aspect, village rakshak dals and other items are the need of the hour.