

COMMUNITY POLICING –AN IDEA & ITS IMPLEMENTATION

An Interview with Satyajit Mohanty (Additional Director General of Police, Odisha)

Mr. Mohanty is an IPS officer (Batch of 1988) and the author of five books. He is an Executive Committee Member of National Police Mission of Government of India and recipient of the President's Police Medal (2012).

He recently launched a book on Community Policing – an initiative in which the police becomes friendly and engrained with the society.

7:35 p.m., Saturday 15th November, 2014

In person

Tejas: Despite being a police officer you have been a prolific writer, how are you able to manage this?

Satyajit: One should do what he enjoys, not just enjoy what he does. There is a subtle difference. I am very passionate about writing. Police literature is not comprehensive. There is a gap I can fill. This feeling creates the motivation in me. I sit late in the night to write two-three pages even if it is late maybe around twelve or one. I need to do this after office hours. However I don't resent these three-four hours. I like this extra responsibility even if it is a little more than what I can handle.

Tejas: Your decision to enroll back in college after twenty three years of work in the police force

Satyajit: I was in the rank of IGP in the state government when I joined the Public Policy course. There were two three things which inspired me – like lawyers and doctors who are professionals. There is something called continuous medical education for the doctors– if the doctor is not in touch with what is latest in the field – then he is out of the competition. Same thing is true with lawyers as well. The law changes frequently and he needs to be well versed as well. Police officers are also a group of professionals – implementing law and enforcing law and I would call them social scientists.

The job of a policeman is to maintain order in the society and enforce law, but these two things encompass so many other things. In the policy stage at the senior level, you can think of certain policies, certain guidelines or certain instructions at your level, so that related issues can be addressed.

A police officer, like a lawyer or a doctor needs to update his or her knowledge base. A course like this gives a huge platform to reinvent and give a new perspective to what you're doing through courses like – economics, public finance, HR, leadership, intra and entrepreneurship and social marketing. Basically, the course is like management in Government. One has a different take or perspective on different issues and this helps to shape our perspectives and results in a holistic view. This attracted me.

Tejas: You carry nearly twenty eight years of experience now. How did your perspective develop over the years? How did the idea of community policing come about?

Satyajit: Let us consider the case of community policing, which I was doing way back in 2002. As a police practitioner, I introduced it on my own, but I couldn't understand why it was not surviving the system.

Then, I was a part of the National Police Mission, in a team called Micro Mission Two on Community Policing –giving policy proposals to the Government of India. I have been involved in this since 2008, three years before I joined this program. I could see that this scheme is the future since it was also being implemented by all police organizations across the world.

After the public policy course which I undertook as part of my education- I was able to understand why it did not work. For a public policy, it goes through certain stages and in certain stages; the importance of the policy was not understood. Then there are other requirements, such as an environment, an agenda setting and a person to act as a policy entrepreneur to navigate and establish the policy.

Kerala police is one of the best examples of community policing. It has the backing and commitment of the state government. That is how it has to be – it cannot be left to the whims and fancies of the police officers. It has to be system driven. It should not be individual driven. You'll be happy to be know, a similar policy has been introduced in my home state, Orissa.

Tejas: Yes you established a similar system in Bhubaneshwar.

Satyajit: The overarching model of police, Samithi and District Advisory was introduced in April, 2013 as a policy of the government. In fact, I drafted this policy and presented it to the Ministers and senior bureaucrats. It was accepted as a Government policy in the state of Orissa in 2013.

Tejas: Research that we do is intended to be translated to implementation, you achieved that. Why another book and more research?

Satyajit: There was a big gap in research in community policing. I have been a member of the National Police Mission on Community Policing since 2008. I had the opportunity to witness the best practices across India and internationally and as a practitioner, I introduced it in my own jurisdiction. A lot of research is available through impact studies – on the community and the police force. But I don't think anybody has studied it from the process point of view. How and why did this happen? What were the compelling circumstances? Is there any kind of agenda setting? From the process point of view, public policy or policy process point of view, there was hardly any study. My dissertation was this process analysis, a policy process analysis of a particular policy process in Kerala. From there, we built a hypothesis, or you can say a theory, or matrix I developed. The processes are so important. Suppose any state has to replicate the framework, what has to be kept in mind – these are the parameters / process. I did a comparison between USA and India on the community policing front.

Tejas: While implementing community policing – there is also a significant difference across geographies in the way the police behaves. In North India, it is not as proactive as it is in Kerala. While implementing this framework, what are the cultural issues?

Satyajit: You are right. In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, some police officers introduced this scheme, but it didn't survive. On the other hand, when it becomes a public policy, there is a political will, there is a precondition, and the Government has commitment.

Human Development Index differs across states. Kerala's HDI is equivalent to OECD countries. In Kerala, a policeman visits houses and people often give a cup of tea. It feels good. In the North, when a policeman visits a house, the neighbors will start whispering about warrants.

This mindset needs to change, it need not be overnight – community policing as such is a long term policy in itself. It takes about twenty years to have that kind of effect in the police organization, and more so in the society. Some states at this level of socio economic development will take more time. It will be difficult, it will be challenging, we cannot avoid it for long, and if we do, it is our own peril.

Tejas: How is this research on community policing or any policing topic relevant to students?

Satyajit: Less governance & more liberalization are not sustainable; the state has to step in to avoid a market failure in many aspects. Even if you are working in the private domain, you will face regulations. State regulations and policies will drive how the private and public sector organizations function in this environment.

Ultimately, whatever you do, it will be under state scrutiny. If you are aware of that, you will be a better manager. If you are in the private sector, never assume you are away from the shackles of the government. Post 2008 in USA, we realized that too much of non-governance is not ultimately good for the economy of the state. We are in the era of regulation – when you are working in the private sector you should know the overall environment you are working in. That gives you a broader perspective. The courses of macroeconomics, public finance and tax cut across all sectors.