

RAIPUR- MEDIA AND POLICE

By Shashank Thakur

Project Assistant, CHRI

Public security concerns the responsibility of policing services for the safety and well being of individuals and local communities. The primary institutional provider of public security is the police; whether at the local, regional or national level. With regard to police organisation, the media plays varied roles in different jurisdictions.

Free and independent media are key element in democracies, where they play a vital political role in keeping governments and citizens aware of, and in contact with one another. According to democratic theory the media functions as a bridge, transmission belt between society and those who govern. An effective and independent media can function as a government watchdog by subjecting the actions of the government to public scrutiny and there by holding governments to account for their policies and management of the public sphere. The media and the police have an independent and often symbiotic relationship in society that is characterized both by co-operation and conflict. The mass media play an important role in shaping citizen attitudes towards law enforcement agencies. An important and accurate media facilitates democratic governance, and at its best functions to uphold accountability, transparency and good governance in the public sector.

The media in Chhattisgarh has been efficiently playing its role as an important limb of democracy and watchdog of government. There is extensive coverage on police in local media. The news on police related issues covers a wide span of news ranging from crime, transparency/accountability etc. to bad behaviour /police sub culture. Some news papers mainly concentrate on the crime stories and stories about bad behaviour, excessive use of force and police sub culture; whereas there are some news papers which give extensive coverage to police messages, initiatives taken by police, lack of infrastructure and resources in police, political control etc. apart from crime and law and order problems.

Print and electronic media tend to give extensive coverage to crime stories. One of the consequences of such media coverage is the exaggeration of the prevalence of violent crime in the public mind. Another consequence is the widespread yet erroneous public perception that police work primarily concerns enforcement and crime fighting aspects. In reality the police role has broadened and the majority of police work typically involves performing administrative functions such as traffic management and VIP duties. The local media document informs the public about crime, threats to the security of individuals and the community, and sometimes about measures taken by police to address community problems. The media also alerts the public to instances of public violence, abuse, corruption and mismanagement or less dramatically policies that are misguided or simply do not work.

The news media structure their activities in order to produce stories about crime efficiently. News production involves condensing the large number of local, state and national crime incidents into a limited amount of news space. These stories report the facts of a particular crime satisfying the 5 Ws of journalistic writing (Who, What, When, Where and Why), but sometimes are removed from institutional explanations as to why crimes occur. Most of the reports on police and crime are narrative devoid of technical inputs. The target group of the media is the citizen. Hence there must be technical inputs for the accurate and better understanding of the news reports to facilitate the growth of informed citizen in the country.

The content analysis is based on the news reports published in 3 news paper namely Navbharat, Dainik Bhaskar and Hitvada, ranging for a period between 1st June 2005 to 31st July 2005. Apart from the regular news items on Crime, the news concerning police behaviour and police action has been classified into various headings viz: -

USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE:

During this period there was lot of news regarding police torture and unwarranted use of force. There were 5 news items, which talked about the beating and parading of the

gamblers (engaged in satta). On 08/06/05 and 11-12/06/05 there were two different items in the newspapers that spoke about the naked parading of the gamblers (engaged in writing satta patti) and the other news mentioned that a placard was hung around their neck (message against gambling) and were beaten up and paraded. There had been a case where the goons were paraded in their locality and were asked to chant slogan “ *police hamari baap hai, goondagardi karna paap hai*”. In all these cases the police action was based on the preventive sections of Cr.P.C and Gambling act.

None of the news items have criticized or questioned the alleged brutality of police, which they are supposed to do since this act of the concerned police personal goes against the very dignity of human life and police rules. After this there was no follow up of the actions taken by the police departments. If the incidents in the above mentioned news items is true, then none of the above-mentioned newspapers have criticized the use of excess force and inhuman methods adopted by the police in dealing with the accused. The above-mentioned acts of the police are inhuman and against the human dignity. The newspapers should have raised this issue and opposed the police behaviour, because the actions in these cases were blatant violation of the existing provisions and guidelines of human rights.

The police through their actions clearly flouted the specific guidelines regarding arrest and interrogation issued by the Supreme Court in D.K Basu’s Case¹. As far as parading of the accused is concerned the Supreme Court in State of Maharashtra v. Ravikant S. Patil² has observed that the dignity of the arrested person should be protected. Public display or parading of arrested person is not permitted.

Art 2 of the U.N. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS REQUIRES LAW enforcement officials to respect and protect human dignity and maintain and uphold human rights, for police to argue that it is necessary or justifiable to break the law or "bend the rules" in order to prevent crime or maintain /restore public order is indefensible

¹ D.K.Basu v. State of West Bengal AIR 1997 SC 610

In this case the SC issued 13 directives for the police regarding arrest and investigation procedure

² 1991 SCC 373

because if police break law in order to enforce law, they are not reducing criminality, they are adding to it.

There was no condemnation of the above-mentioned incidents by the media. The media should have told the police that it is their duty to respect and obey law. In a democratic state where the rule of law prevails, no person or institution is above the law, and every person and every institution is accountable to the law. It is particularly incumbent on police officials, as law enforcement officials, to work entirely and always within the law.

POLITICAL PRESSURE:

The content of the newspapers strengthen the undisputed fact of Political control over the police. There was news on 20/06/05, which says that six people were caught for gambling and were released on personal bonds. The newspapers have discussed that as soon as the accused were brought to the police station, the station was flooded with telephone calls from the influential coterie of the town. It further states that since the case was registered under section 4(a) of Gambling Act the accused were released from the police station after furnishing personal bond. After reading this the mass would think that they were released due to political pressure, the press should have informed that, since the act of the accused was bailable they were released from the police station. Had the newspapers in this case discussed the various ways through which the politicians control the police, it would have been easy for the public to understand the concept of political pressure on police.

There are some more interesting stories relating to posting, transfers and deputation of police personals where political pressure plays an important role.

POLICE SUB CULTURE:

It is often said that the subculture in the police is not good. This is the common grievance of the people that the police do not talk to them properly and behave rudely. One leading newspaper published a detailed report on this aspect of police. This article is about the

use of abusive language by the police personals. This is a balanced news item and discusses both the sides of the issue. Various problems faced by the police in the field while dealing with the criminals are discussed in a sensitive way. On this issue the report also mentions the comments of higher police officials and experts from the fields of sociology and psychology.

CORRUPTION:

On 15/07/2005 news was published regarding the posting of police personals in the R.T.O. It states that the police personals spend lakhs of rupees to secure a berth for themselves in the R.T.O. department. This piece states the amount paid by the police personals for respective positions in the said department. This also states that the police personal are able to recover the whole bribe paid within one year of their service in this department. This is a well researched article, but it should also tell the public that to whom do these police personal give the money for their posting in R.T.O so that the people may also know the parties to this unholy nexus.

Again there is news where some small shopkeepers complained to the Chief Minister against the unauthorized collection of money by the police. The corrupt practice of some of the police personals is tarnishing the image of the police organisation and this is the responsibility of the media that these cases should be brought forward.

TRANSPARENCY/ACCOUNTABILITY:

News published on 18/07/2005 discusses the pending cases and the heavy burden on the police. This is a good article, supplemented with facts and figures. The reporter has given some examples of the preventive action under Cr. P.C. and the conditions when these are taken. This also states that every year a target is given to every police station regarding preventive action. He should have asked the legality and basis behind these targets. How are these targets fixed? Are the crime figures coming down? From the news papers perused, it seems as if there is lot of focus on preventive detention targets and this is reported to the press without much analysis. Since these targets are given by higher

officials, and in order to fulfill these, a number of innocent people are booked under preventive measures in an arbitrary manner.

Preventive action taken by police under Cr.P.C. 1973 and other acts:

- (1) Section 110: - Security for good behaviour from habitual offenders
- (2) Section 107: - Security for keeping the peace in other cases
- (3) Section 151,109: - Arrest to prevent the commission of cognizable offences/
Security for good behaviour from suspected persons.
- (4) Section 25, 34 Police: - Against persons those who create disorder.

In this regard Supreme Court in *Gopalachari v. State of Kerala*³ has observed that unless this section is prevented from misuse, many a poor person can be imprisoned by being labeled “habitual” or “desperate” or “dangerous”. The court held that person being charged under section 110 and other preventive sections of Cr.P.C. must constitute a “clear and present” danger to society. Newspapers have criticized this practice.

Good Practices in Police:

Apart from the news on crime, corruption, police subculture etc. there are news about the commendable work done by the police and the initiatives taken by them with regard to building a relationship of mutual trust and faith with people. These include the reports of meeting on community policing held in two localities where the residents of that particular locality and the police shared a common platform for solving their problems and curbing crime. The newspapers also publish the messages given by the police from time to time for prevention of crimes and other social issues.

Conclusion:

The media should share with the police, what they need to do in their job (the good practices); this question needs to be reversed as well. News media can hold the police accountable to the public by critically evaluating current responses to crime, promoting alternatives and informing the public. News organizations are in a strategic position to

³ 1980 SCC 649

educate the public about the effectiveness of police responses to crime because the public uses the media sources to develop opinions about crime.

One of the issues that arise in media-police relations, yet is not often discussed, is the need for journalistic restraint and discretion. When not carefully and rigorously researched, or when unreliable witness speculation and unethical leaks are used, journalist's reports can severely damage police- community relations.

The media has a responsible role not only in expediting breaking stories but educating the public on why some practices by police may seem irregular but have a basis for sound enforcement management. *The responsible reporting in press entails the promotion of public interest.* It is high time that the police should appreciate that the news media are part of policing apparatus of society, and can be controlled and put to good use in this respect.
